

Easter 2019

Luke 24:1-12

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¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, 'Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ "The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

In recent years, the phenomenon of hate speech has emerged. Especially in the social media it is easy to express your own bad feeling by telling off others. Unfortunately, it is quite commonplace to even insult or threaten each other. In social media you do

not have to find out how others experience our words. Empathy does not come about easily in social media.

However, I think that hate speech is not a new phenomenon. There are probably almost always small groups where the language has been similar to the rough and tough talk in today's social media - for example, think about people that gathered in a bar in the petrol station, a traditional pub, a sewing club, a workplace coffee room, or during school playtimes or at the workplace. At these kind of occasions, hate speech has been used in a really coarse way, without spearing words. So hate speech has always been around. But in the past, the coarse words used were heard only by a few ears.

But then there is also a very, very different kind of hate speech, which I would call internal hate speech. It is the kind of hate speech we use in our own mind quietly for and against ourselves. It is our own negative attitude towards ourselves, our self-underestimation and disregard. It is the wrong kind of servility or humility. It is self-denial and speaking harsh words to ourselves.

I am not quite sure whether such a hate speech has increased or decreased over time. However, I guess that it has decreased, fortunately, because our modern western central megatrend is the "levelling out" or "equalisation" of relations between people. It refers, above all, to the decrease of social hierarchies between people in different contexts of society. This is evident, among others, as an equalisation of relationships between children and parents, or a change of managerial relationships between superiors and junior employees from formality towards informality. Everyone today is kind of good friends with each other. This phenomenon is very good, because authoritarian leadership and attitudes towards others have decreased. Equality has increased.

But why then do people use hate speech in relation to themselves or to others?

When people direct hate speech to themselves or another person, I think it speaks of their own insecurity, fears or uncertainty and confusion about their identity. Of course, fear may be appropriate in some cases. No fear is always a the bad case. Also, only a few people deliberately want to harm another; but these kind of people are around, unfortunately.

However, we can decrease our own insecurity and thereby increase our tolerance, and thus accept diversity and uncertainty around us. How? By learning how to feel about yourselves: who or what you are. By learning to know and better recognise our own qualities, our own character trait. We can increase our sense of security by learning to see our own limits and our own strengths in different matters. When we know who or what we are, it is easier for us to let others be who or what they are.

This is how we come to an important theme of what we are, or who we are: who you are, who I am. From where or how do you get your identity, or your entire being?

According to the general psychological definition, identity is "a person's individual perception of him- or herself". Human identity is shaped during childhood and adolescence, by people interacting with each other. In order to becoming aware of our own identity, we requires feedback and interpretation from others. To a certain extent, the development of our identity continues throughout life.

Our own individualistic Western culture often assumes that our identity is primarily based on what rights and freedoms we have; It is generally thought that identity is what opportunities we have or do not have. It is often thought that our identity is

reduced, if we cannot or are not allowed to do certain things in relation ourselves or others.

Of course it is good and right to defend human rights, and of course we want to be deeply involved also as Christian! It is also certainly true that, according to the basic idea of Christianity, our identity also consists of independence in relation to others and even independence in relation to God. For example, freedom of religion is a deep value of our Christian faith. We Christians do not want anyone to be forced into Christianity, its content, or its forms in any way - even though we believe that our faith in Jesus Christ our Lord is the foundation of our whole life.

But our contemporary Western and freedom-based identity view is insufficient. Its deficiency is seen when we compare it to the Christian view of human identity, our very being [in the sight of God, BF].

According to our Christian faith, our identity and being is not primarily about our rights and freedoms: according to the Bible, our identity is not what we are free to do in relation to others, or what is our ability to fulfil ourselves. According to today's universal, freedom-based view, however, we are the most perfect when everyone can – if so desired – be everything, do everything and become whoever or whatever we want, regardless of anything or anyone else. The Christian says that yes: being a human is a lot of the aforementioned too.

But, first and foremost, the foundation of our identity and being as well as the most important building material for ourselves is our Christian faith and the fact that God has created us as us. God has created you and me in his own image; God has created you and me as precious and invaluable beings – just as unique as you and I are. This is the message of the Christian faith about identity! And there is also the basic

mission of the Christian Church. And that is what the Church wants to point out both in the sharing of the gospel and in the love of the neighbour.

Because of the reality of sin in you and me, there is a lot of brokenness and incompleteness in our identity and being. But our holy and good God has completely solved this problem for us: He redeemed us or set us free from the corruptness of sin by becoming one of us. God came to us with the same identity! God Himself became a man, a human being in Jesus Christ. And He did not just remain in this condition: in addition to this, God wanted to show his forgiveness to us in the deepest possible way: by dying Himself on our behalf.

The reason for this is that we would no longer need to die forever, or be damned eternally, or be separated infinitely from our good Creator, from Him, Who wants to hold us in his lap and give us eternal identity as His heirs, as brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus. In Christ's death for us we can see that God levelled Himself out or He became equal to us. By dying on our behalf He wanted to share our part as a human, to share our "destiny".

So that is why our Lord Jesus Christ wanted to endure the cross, despite all his pain. We read about this today from the Gospel of Luke. Our Lord did not choose suffering because suffering in itself would be something admirable. No, there is nothing admirable about suffering. Our Lord suffered because suffering is so familiar to us all, unfortunately often too familiar. Our Lord suffered that we all, through His suffering, would realise what price God was ready to pay for us, of you and of me.

Our holy God gave His most precious, His Son, as a payment or ransom for us to be His: To be, simply to be with Him, in peace and rest, without the demands of our own accountability and performance – but only thanks to Him and His doing. This is

where and from whom we receive our identity – from God. Our God-given true being does not come to us because of our accomplishments. It does not come primarily through our self-realisation or our freedoms.

On the contrary, our true being comes into being through God Himself, who gave us life. In social media language: we can share life with him and live with him! Life, not death. Because life is God's own and He shares it with us, that's why it's ours too!

That's why we are celebrating our Lord's victory over death this Easter. And that's why Easter is the most important festivity of Christianity; Easter may not be the biggest event in terms of people participating in it, but it certainly has the most important content and message.

Based on this message and God's reality, we will rejoice and enjoy this Easter – even beforehand and afterwards, of course! Rejoice at what or who we are in the sight of our good God. If we realise what our identity or being is in God's eyes, then we do not have to think about our own actions or abilities or the lack thereof. We are God-created and Christ-redeemed, precious and imperishable treasures. You and me, everyone.

Because God values us so greatly, so no one of us needs to belittle ourselves anymore or carry unnecessary burdens of guilt; our God will not belittle us or condemn us guilty forever! That is why we no longer need to give the hate speech to ruin ourselves or anyone else – whether in social media or face to face.

Of course there is genuine and healthy guilt, as we fall short of greatness. But the essential thing here is that we should never talk against anyone: such a speech is always wrong, it is hate speech. Man was originally created for good, but his deeds

also were evil. That is why we should always speak against any kind of wrongdoing, but never against a person, not even against a person who has done wrong or evil.

Here we must distinguish between the person and his or her evil deeds. But how can I speak against wrongdoings without speaking to someone who has done wrong or is doing wrong? It is such a kind of super-skill that only its expert can separate the wrong hate speech from the real hate speech. At least I have a lot to learn about it!

Dear friends, based on the Easter message, we can focus on the fact that our holy God has given us all an imperishable being and identity; He has given us our immortal body and soul, our precious humanity. Here, before Him, we are all on the same line or level and equally valuable. Our God does not look at the person, but gives his gift – life – to all of us! Accordingly, we too should relate to each other! Therefore, in the morning of the Resurrection, when our Lord conquered death and evil, is full of new life, joy, rest, peace and mutual love!

Let's pray: Our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ. You gave up your heavenly glory, took the shape of a slave and became one of us. You walked for us on the road of pain. Silence us to search the infinite gift of your love. We thank you that – thanks to you – we can receive the forgiveness of our sins and have salvation from death. Thank you for hearing us, you who live and rule with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and forever. Amen.