

# 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

## **Acts 17.22-31**

**Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said,**

**"For we too are his offspring."**

**Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'**

## **What's going on?**

**In this passage from the Acts of the Apostles, we find St Paul in Athens talking to the people of the city as a philosopher. Paul has been studying the Athenians and their religious rituals and worship of many gods. Paul contrasts the forms and beliefs of their religious customs with what the new Christians now believe about Jesus. God is greater than their religious imagining of gods in human form living in shrines. Further we are to think about ourselves in relationship with God, not just in terms of gods and**

mortals. Such a God is active and dynamic. He has raised Jesus from the dead and is coming in judgement.

Particularly significant in this passage is Paul's acknowledgement that people 'would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him— though indeed he is not far from each one of us.' He has a great deal of sympathy for people on a spiritual journey and it is to such people, those who create altars to 'an unknown god' that he feels his story is most relevant.

## **Psalm 66 7-18**

**There we rejoiced in him, who rules by his might for ever,  
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—  
let the rebellious not exalt themselves.**

*Selah*

**Bless our God, O peoples,  
let the sound of his praise be heard,  
who has kept us among the living,  
and has not let our feet slip.  
For you, O God, have tested us;  
you have tried us as silver is tried.  
You brought us into the net;  
you laid burdens on our backs;  
you let people ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and through water;  
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**

**I will come into your house with burnt-offerings;  
I will pay you my vows,  
those that my lips uttered  
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.  
I will offer to you burnt-offerings of fatlings,  
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;  
I will make an offering of bulls and goats.**

*Selah*

**Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell what he has done for me.  
I cried aloud to him,  
and he was extolled with my tongue.  
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.**

## **What's going on?**

**This is a psalm of praise for God's goodness towards Israel. The psalmist reflects on how God has accompanied the people through trials and tribulations and brought them safely through. The psalmist is filled with gratitude and wants to thank God, but, more than this, to tell people about what God has done. This fits with the passage we have heard from Acts, because Paul's experience of Jesus Christ compels him to tell the Athenians about the understanding of what God has done in Christ. So these passages explain why and how Christians evangelise: to explain Christian theology and truth to others, but also to do so out of a sense of gratitude and thanks to a God with whom we are in relationship.**

### **1 Peter 3.13-22**

**Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the**

**resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.**

## **What's going on?**

This letter also tells us some more about Christian evangelisation. People who are searching for faith in their spiritual journey respond to the hope that is in Christians and want to know why it is there and this requires Christians to talk about and share what Christian hope is. This will not necessarily be a lot of fun as people can be hostile or unkind, but Christians must always behave graciously and politely, telling their faith stories 'with grace and reverence'. It is important to show the Christian faith as well as tell it, especially by good behaviour and living an exemplary life.

### **John 14.15-21**

#### **The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

**'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.**

**'I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'**

## **What's going on?**

Following on from the previous reading, we immediately hear the words of Jesus reminding Christians that love of Jesus requires keeping the commandments and leading exemplary lives to show to others the importance of right living as a consequence of Christian faith. In this passage, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his disciples. Jesus talks about

**his death and leaving them behind, but the Holy Spirit of God will sustain them and allow them to establish the Church. Christians must decide to live in a certain way as a witness to the truth of the gospel. In return, God will not abandon any Christian and each one can be certain of the constancy and surety of God's love in their daily lives. This Jesus promises, absolutely.**