

Sixth Sunday after Easter 21 May 2017

[Acts 17: 22-31; Psalm 66: 8-20; 1 Peter 3: 8-22; John 14:15-21](#) Vanderbilt

[Easter 6 A May 21 2017](#) Textweek

"Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way."

Today I stand with Paul, in the very place that Paul stands as recounted in the gospel; for he stands before a community of believers, a faithful community and speaks of change and of a new tomorrow.

And I stand here today in the shadow of a new tomorrow, for this time next month I will not be here; rather I, and we, shall be encountering a new and different world; we shall be engaging a whole new possibility.

In Paul's words

"The God who made the world and everything in it..... 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."

He speaks to those who are comfortable with a god that they have already found, he acknowledges their way of being, and then he reveals that there is yet more.

We all know, or think we know, the easiest path through life; it is to leave things as they are; somehow we are beings that gravitate to the status quo, at times almost unaware of the changing and evolving nature of creation. Sometimes we are surprised when we see old photos, we are surprised by the degree of change we have experienced; and we are also afraid of that same process of change, for it reminds us that there is a movement in every life and we know that movement will take us to the grave.

We readily acknowledge that

"he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live"

and yet we do not embrace that same degree of knowing to the whole process of Resurrection.

Listening carefully to Paul he speaks to us also of another life process;

"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."

And it is in that 'searching' and 'groping' that we uncover a very different life process, one that engages us in movement toward discovering God, and so discovering life's eternal quality, that which goes beyond the

“allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live”.

Like the Athenians we all can be seen as “*extremely religious.... in every way*”; although having said that, we are probably all feeling a little uncomfortable with the label “*extremely religious*”.

One thing we can perhaps more fully agree with and that is in recognising that Paul spoke of something more; and for each and all of us there is something more to be found in life.

Paul is encouraging the Athenians to move beyond the comfort of their belief, to change the very pattern of their day-to-day being; and it is an echo that we might also hear today.

In the gospel we hear Jesus reveal that “because I live, you also will live” and in these words the reality of resurrection is made explicit; and we might pause to contemplate that reality for ourselves.

Life, lived in the resurrection, is of a different paradigm to that we experience through our senses; it is a way of living that does not hold the grave as a destination; rather it is a life lived ‘in the Spirit’. And from Paul today we hear that finding that life involves ‘searching’ and ‘groping’ for God.

Paul goes on to say;

“While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent”

and repentance is a change of heart and mind that brings us closer to God.

The other night someone said to me that they heard I was retiring; and I told them I had no intention of retiring; and reflecting on that conversation, I think it is more accurate to say I’m repenting; I’m seeking to follow that path that Paul is outlining to the Athenians.

I know that more is asked of us, and more is being asked of me; so we have the next three weeks together to explore that ‘more’; to discover together a new way of living together in the same Spirit; and just as more is being asked of me, I will ask more of you.

If we can ‘repent’ together, then together we can continue to

“search for God and perhaps grope ... and find God.”

If we seek the paradigm of life that Paul discovered in the revelation of Christ, then we will change our destination, we will no longer point to the grave but will actively engage in moving toward that which is unbounded by death.

Remember the propensity we all have to gravitate to the status quo; we will experience a struggle in the act of repenting; and perhaps that’s why so many just retire; or leave it to someone else.

Well I’m not leaving it to the Donald Trumps to decide tomorrow, and I’m not retiring from the search even if that seems like groping in the dark at times.

And I'm encouraged into the darkness of change by some of the recent poetic reflections we've enjoyed which take away the fear of the dark.

O dark dark dark. They all go into the dark,

....

And we all go with them, into the silent funeral,

Nobody's funeral, for there is no one to bury.

I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you

Which shall be the darkness of God.

T. S. Eliot - "East Coker," from *The Four Quartets*

Over the next three weeks let's look together as Athenians and see if we can embrace Paul's call to repent; asking ourselves some questions that will open up perhaps a new and different way of life, a new movement into the one "in whom we live and move and have our being" as one body.

The ask that I am seeking to respond to is to give more to our work in Nepal, to build that into a sustainable model that will grow beyond a dependence on our giving. And the ask that we, the community here need to respond to is to build and grow this icon of the Divine so that we also continue to make manifest the Divine life in a wider secular culture.

We need to look beyond the repetition of past patterns, and entertain new and different paradigms that will bring life to ourselves and change the lives of those who blindly move in a cultural rut.

Each one of us will be asked to give more as we manage a time of transition; and each one of us does have more to give.

In the next three weeks we will have much to consider; the AGM will outline our plans for the immediate future the year ahead, and looking at our end of year financial statement, which is really a credit to us in the Athenian scheme of things, we still have more commitments to meet if we are to follow the path of 'Repent' rather than 'Retire'.

And some of the new energy, opportunities, personalities and our ever changing community make-up is an encouraging poem that should take us through the darkness of transition into a delightful new Eden.

And having just completed a one year Budget for our work in Nepal, I'm now looking toward a five year commitment, and that is shaping up to be a \$2million enterprise which will again ask more of me and more of us.

"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.' 29 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."

Paul identifies a new understanding of God, that is still waiting to be found; a living moving being that is manifested in creation; and this is our claim, our deepest desire as 'the Body of Christ', it is the deepest calling of all who seek the Divine when we look beyond the idols of religion, and the worldly gravity that turns us into statues of the culture.

Over the next three weeks please be mindful of the movement that we are a part of, be mindful of the call to repent and be mindful of the changes that we will bring about either by our action or by our inaction.

Stopping by the woods on a snowy evening
by Robert Frost

Whose woods these are i think i know
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound'd the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But i have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Amen

Peter Humphris