

Sermon Notes Sixth Sunday of Easter

[Acts 17:22-31; John 14:15-21](#)

I am with you, “I will not leave you orphaned”

During the season of Easter, we tell the story of the spread of the Good News of the Resurrection in the book of The Acts of the Apostles, a continuation of the telling of the story by the author of the Gospel of Luke. All our readings this season are from the New Testament. The focus this Sunday in Acts is Paul’s encounter with the people of Athens -gentiles-and his preaching at the Areopagus. Paul seeks to connect to the educated people who are curious about what Paul wants to say. In this story of how Paul “preached” to the gentiles in Athens, we see that he spoke first of what the people knew about their gods and then talks about their religious statutes. “*I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god’.*” Paul uses this reference to suggest that the God they do not know is the One God, maker of heaven and earth.

Why might this be important for us? Paul begins his conversation with what the Athenians experience and quotes from their own poetry, “*in whom we live and move and have our being*”. Paul does not need to speak to the non-Jew audience only from a Jewish scriptural perspective, he can speak knowledgeably, thinking about their own culture. The resurrection is about being embodied and in relationship with the One who is a not a new god and one of many, but a God being revealed to them, in order that they might not worship inanimate statues of stone and gold. Some individuals want to learn more; not everyone is converted, but I would suggest that Paul’s approach, to know the people with whom he is speaking is important to us now—not as much in our conversations in church, as in our conversations with others in our lives. Do we want to share the “Good News” in our hearts with others? Can we listen and understand their stories?

In the Gospel of John this week Jesus continues to speak to his followers on what is going to happen next. He will be arrested, brought into the Roman court and sentenced to death. He is leaving them. They are fearful and do not understand; the text a continuation of the narrative from last week: “do not let your hearts be troubled”. The Farewell Discourse from the Gospel of John is the conversation Jesus has with his disciples Thursday night before he is arrested and sent to his death and is too long to all be read on a Sunday. This passage speaks to the promise that Jesus will not leave them alone. Jesus “hears” their fears that they will bereft without him, not only as their teacher and friend, but as their hoped-for leader to stand up against the Empire. They are feeling what we feel at the loss of a loved one and Jesus is saying, you are not alone; I am with you in our relationship and through the Advocate, the one who is to come. The promise is that through their friendship with Jesus and one another, they know the Love of God and that the Spirit or Comforter will make it possible for them to share this Love that changes us, now in this world.

John introduces us to the power of the Spirit before Jesus’ death and before his resurrection. Even in the anticipating of their loss, the followers of Jesus are reminded that Jesus is the one revealing what it means to Love and serve. On this day it seems important to hear, “*I will not leave you orphaned*”. Our longings not to be alone to work through our challenges or to tackle the world’s problems is a promise of the Advocate who is with us together. We are being invited to think what it means to have a Comforter, a Spirit that continues in us through our relationships with one another. Whatever our circumstance—we are not abandoned. Whatever the weaknesses of family or society, we are not orphaned or left alone. The power of the incarnation, resurrection, ascension, and the gift of the Spirit promise to be with us always.

Do we remember to “turn” change perspective, repent when we feel alone? God is with us.