**Sunday 21 May 2017**

**Easter 6**

***Prayer before worship***

*When it doesn't seem to do any good, Creator God, we dare to be your people, to love those the world would have us reject; to be just in the face of every reason to mistreat; to be unafraid of whatever awaits us. When all the odds seem stacked against, Jesus our Saviour, we dare to live as your sisters and brothers, serving others with our hands and hearts; sharing in the burdens of our world; refusing to leave justice orphaned with no hope. When the wind seems to be knocked out of us
by the blows of life, Eternal Companion, we dare to breathe joy upon those caught in the net of hopelessness; peace into all the broken places around us; wonder for all those who have lost sight of you. In you, we dare to live and breathe and be,
God in Community, Holy in One, Amen. (by Thom Shuman)***Welcome**

**Call to Worship**

Christ is alive!

***He is alive indeed!***

Now we know for sure

that God is not very far from any one of us,

for in God we live and move and have our being.

***Wonderful are you, God our God;***

***you do not scorn our prayers***

***or remove your committed love from us.***

**Songs of Praise:** Lift up your heads

Spirit of gentleness

**Opening Prayer**

Loving God, by your Spirit lace streamers of holy joy through this time of worship, that we may be able to offer you something far brighter than duty and much livelier than religious solemnity. May we open ourselves to your holy presence that we too easily forget, like the fish forgets the water and the bird forgets the air... And as we remember, let us worship you with love and love you with our worship. Through Christ Jesus our ever-living inspiration, Amen.

**Notices**

Grant –listening assignment

**Birthday Basket**

**Offering and Dedication**

**God at Work ???**

**Time with the Children** The Holy Spirit as a helper

When I think of the HS as a helper I wonder what the HS likes to help us do most?

To help us to??? ...

I remember when I was learning to make pikelets as a child some things were very helpful... a griddle is great –but I still can’t find one like my mum’s anywhere to buy... ... –a good sized spachela is a help to make good pikelets too, not too big and not too small... and a good recipe is also a great help to make pikelets... but you know when I was learning to make pikelets, the best help of all was my mum... showing me and standing beside me as I had a go...

I think that is a bit like how The Holy Spirit helps... giving us the tools we need but most of all being alongside us as we learn new things...

But for the HS to help us we have to be helped –and sometimes I go all stubborn –like a child of mine who used to say she wanted to do things *my byself*...

We try to do things alone and forget that we have the HS helping us.

So we need to take a moment, to slow down and remember that we are not alone, that we have a helper... then we can do the things God wants us to do. We can shine the light of Jesus to the world.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Song:** This little light of mine

***Children leave for Young Church programme***

**Powerpoint Reflection:** Psalm 66: 8-20

**Bible Reading:** John 14: 15-21

***15****“If you love me, keep my commands.****16****And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—****17****the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2014:15-21#fen-NIV-26686a)*] in you.****18****I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.****19****Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.****20****On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.****21****Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”*

**Prayer of Confession**

Spirit of Truth..

In a world where truth seems to be distorted with such ease,

We are sorry for the lies we have accepted

And sorry for the truth we avoid

Advocate Spirit,

In a world where so many have no voice

We are sorry for our silence

And our turning away

Helper Spirit

In a world where people are reticent to step forward

We are sorry for the times we have held back

And help has not been given

Counsellor Spirit

In a community of self help

We are sorry for the times we have tried to go it alone

rather than seeking your guidance

Spirit of Truth –here before you we do not have to pretend or make excuses or hide, for we are completely known

And as we seek your forgiveness, may we be found in your peaceful presence.

May your forgiveness reawaken us to all you are calling us to, Amen.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

Because of the living Lord Jesus, we can confidently say:

We are never alone, for the Counsellor, the Spirit of truth, is with us forever*.*

There is laughter and compassion in God’s truth. There is judgement and grace in God’s truth. There is a cross and wounds in God’s truth. There is resurrection joy in God’s truth. And there is forgiveness in God’s Truth, setting us free into fullness of life.

Bidden or unbidden, God is always present.

As the sea is to the fish, as the air is to the bird,

so is God to all who live by faith, hope and love...

Blessed is our God, who has never rejected our prayer,

nor ever removed from us the love that endures forever.

We are a forgiven and reclaimed people. Thanks be to God.

**Song:** Spirit of the living God

**Bible Readings:** 1 Peter 3:13-22

Acts 17: 16-31

1 Peter 3:13-22

**13**Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? **14**But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%203:13-22#fen-NIV-30439a)]; do not be frightened.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%203:13-22#fen-NIV-30439b)] **15**But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, **16**keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. **17**For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. **18**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. **19**After being made alive,[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%203:13-22" \l "fen-NIV-30444c" \o "See footnote c)] he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— **20**to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all,were saved through water, **21**and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%203:13-22#fen-NIV-30446d)] It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22**who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Acts 17: 16-31

**16**While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. **17**So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. **18**A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. **19**Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? **20**You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” **21**(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)

**22**Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. **23**For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

**24**“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.**25**And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.**26**From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. **27**God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. **28**‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2017:22-31#fen-NIV-27552a)] As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2017:22-31#fen-NIV-27552b)]

**29**“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. **30**In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. **31**For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

#### Footnotes: [Acts 17:28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2017:22-31#en-NIV-27552) From the Cretan philosopher Epimenides [Acts 17:28](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts%2017:22-31" \l "en-NIV-27552" \o "Go to Acts 17:28) From the Cilician Stoic philosopher Aratus

**Song:** Spirit, come and fill me now **(new song...)**

**Sermon**

**Hymn:** Belonging, believing, becoming

**Prayers of Intercession**

Today I offer you many spaces in our prayer -inviting you to insert your private love and concern for others.

Let us pray for those who are confused by life, and fear there is no Spirit of truth anywhere...

Spirit of truth enlighten us all.

*Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ’s love.*

Let us pray for those who are too cocksure, who think they hold the truth without error. Spirit of truth enlighten us all...

*Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ’s love.*

Let us pray for those cowered by oppression & suffering, who fear that despair is the truth... Spirit of truth enlighten us all.

*Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ’s love.*

Let us pray for the severely handicapped, who are angry with whatever truth is responsible... Spirit of truth enlighten us all.

*Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ’s love.*

Let us pray for the very healthy and proud, who imagine that all the truth favours the strong... Spirit of truth enlighten us all.

*Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ’s love.*

Let us pray for the dying and those who love them, who fear that death is the ultimate truth. Spirit of truth enlighten us all.

*Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ’s love.*

Let us pray for those who nurse the new born, who today intuitively know that truth is love. Spirit of truth enlighten us all.

*Spirit of truth lead us into the fullness of Christ’s love.*

Let us pray for those who today find faith in Christ, and eagerly want to be led into all truth...

Holy Friend, pervade us with your living Truth, making us more at peace with ourselves and more understanding of others.

Please give us a deeper insight into, and concern for, those who seem shallow, course or utterly selfish.

Make us patient with all who easily irritate us but firm with those who try to manipulate us.

Teach us how to live loyally, lovingly, wisely,

courageously and with abundant good humour.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen!

**Hymn:** Amazing Grace

**Benediction and sung Amen**

Go from this place, speaking of what God has done.
Remind everyone that, despite everything, God loves us.
and has not left us orphaned.
Go from this place, imagining what God will do.
Witness to that hope which may seem distant, yet is as close to us as our hearts.

Let the Spirit of truth be the abiding reality

in your sleeping and waking, working and relaxing, praying and laughing.

And may the love of God be the strength of your mind and heart.

the grace of Christ be the salve for your bruises and wounds.

And the friendship of the Spirit be the joy of your resilient soul.

Now and ever more, Amen.

**Sermon**

**Early this week I opened the Bible and read through the passages for today, as I typically do... and the passage from Acts has niggled away at me ever since. For me, it speaks loudly into our situation here in Kohimarama... and raises some really interesting challenges.**

**So let’s go back and look at what was happening.**

Paul had arrived in Athens to preach the gospel in this beautiful and incredibly culture-conscious city. This was the place of sophistication –here is where elite people talked about philosophy, went to the theatre, discussed architecture, heard skilful orators on esoteric religion and generally though quite highly of themselves.

Paul was noticed by the Athenian elite, as he chatted to people in the public squares and market places about what he believed, talked with philosophers of various schools, and spoke at the local synagogue... and so it was that he was invited to come and speak at the famous Athenian assembly in their meeting place called the Areopagus, at Mars Hill, not far from the Parthenon.

Paul was a really well educated man, a Roman citizen, learned in Hebrew, Roman and Greek literature, so he knew what he was getting into. This was going to be a thinking and critical audience.

And so he starts to speak... words that have been often criticised for their lack of centring on Christ. -Words that affirm the Athenian’s spiritual quests, words that affirmed their public altars and words that affirmed their places of worship.

Paul was speaking words of connection rather than judgement. He was quoting their known poets when he says –*we are God’s offspring*, and he quotes the Cretan philosopher Epimenides and the Cilician Stoic philosopher Aratus.

Paul was able to use such connections because he knew the culture of his day.

And then he is able to springboard from these connections, this knowledge of their thinking, to share the gospel. He could start with *we are God’s offspring,* and then say, if we are really God’s offspring, surely we shouldn’t be depicting God in gold or silver or stone, using human design and skill. He argues that although God overlooked such ignorance, God now wants everyone to repent.

And then he adds Jesus into the mix –and he describes him as the one who has been raised from the dead and who will one day judge us all.

That was when it turned to custard for Paul... for now the audience think he is speaking superstitious nonsense. And so while some jeered, others ushered him away. These educated men thought they knew better than to believe someone had risen from the dead in some new body. They knew that dead was dead. They were too well educated to think such things were possible.

And I can’t help but think that this is the kind of conversation that could so easily be repeated here in sophisticated Auckland today. People caught up in a culture of knowledge and ? –and a people who find it difficult to understand the strange gospel news of a man risen from the dead.

So when I look through this passage, there are two parts to the speech at the Areopagus –the first is this real need for finding common ground with those we share with... and the second is the just as real need to include the resurrected Jesus which will often bring a point of challenge.

I think too often we get only one or the other part of these two... we either make every effort to relate –to connect –to understand the culture we are part of... and then fail to include the crucified and risen Jesus. Or we try to tell of the risen Jesus without making any real connections with the people.

At the one end we have interesting conversations around movies and books and podcasts but avoid bringing Jesus into the talking... and at the other end is the preacher on the street corner who is ignored by most who walk past.

From Paul we are reminded that both parts are important –Paul knew that... so he did both.

But underneath this, Paul knew that faith is a gift –able to be received or rejected, but offered anyway. He would offer the gift in the best way he could. And then he would deal with the doubts of those around him and move forward.

Paul knew that he had to work out of an understanding of those he was meeting. No two groups will be the same so there will be no set speech that will suffice –there is no *one size fits all* approach.

He makes no effort to quote Scripture in this Greek context, because this is not a Jewish audience –here the people will not assume that Scripture holds any particular truth. For them, truth is sought elsewhere and so that is where he starts.

So he quotes pagan poetry –a more common place where Greeks explored the meaning of truth, and he affirms their seeking, even if it is quite alternative.

Paul knows the people and he knows his own faith story –enough to present them in any manner of ways. For Paul in this situation he felt no obligation to talk about the cross or quote Scripture.

-Which begs the question... Are we confident enough to use material from other religions, or contemporary poets or movies or books as a bridge to the gospel? Are we even aware of where our local community goes to, to explore the meaning of truth. Issues around Donald Trump and journalism, or around Harry Potter or The Da Vinci code or TV programmes like Sensing Murder... are we willing to allow our culture be a starting point for a conversation about truth and about faith.

So where do you think the people in our community seek truth or spirituality?

I think movies and books and podcasts are a huge venue for truth seeking today, so maybe that is one of the starting points for sharing faith. The conversations are there ready to happen.

So then when I turn to our reading from **1 Peter and hear Peter telling his audience –who we know is experiencing significant suffering for their faith, to be ready to make a defence of the hope God has given them, I am challenged.**

**Peter writes -**

*Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

**I suspect most of us don’t think we need to give a reason or defend our faith; we assume if we keep quiet we can just go on doing our own thing and it will all be fine. There is no expectation to offer an explanation as to why we believe and act the way we do.**

**But if our faith is maturing and becoming integrated into who we are, it is reasonable to expect us to be able to explain ourselves in terms of what we believe and why. And with the advice of Peter, to ensure that when you do explain what and why you believe, that do it with gentleness and respect.**

**To be ready to answer when the conversation goes there...**

**And in reality, that kind of speaking out will only happen if and when we work at it, bit by bit, by being willing to share our thoughts and feelings, with gentleness and respect.**

**I don’t mean that every conversation we have must include that Jesus is risen... but I do believe we are given way more opportunities to share Jesus than we take up.**

**And I wonder how Paul would have spoken if he was asked to speak in a public gathering in central Auckland...**

***People of Auckland, I*** *see that you are all very religious –I walk around the city and see the monuments you have built for your worship ...*

I wonder how might this speech continue?

What do you think are the ways Christianity finds common ground with current popular thinking and what do you think arethe times when Christianity challenges current popular thinking?

How would you rewrite this in our context –the things we agree with and the things we don’t... it’s worth thinking about this week...

So be it, Amen.