

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

May 25, 2014

Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year A

The readings this week:

- Acts 17:22-31 ◦ Psalm 66:8-20
- 1 Peter 3:13-22 ◦ John 14:15-21

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

American Idols

When Paul was speaking to the citizens of Athens (that's Greece, not Kentucky), he said that people search for God, when truly God is quite close by.

Searchers. Isn't that what we all are? Maybe not everyone searches for God. There are those who search for God, those who search for meaning, those who search for joy. Some seek health and happiness, some look for family and belonging, some seek peace and solitude. There are people who long for fame, and people who want nothing more than quiet anonymity, people who want to be rich, and people who are ready to simplify their lives by getting rid of possessions.

Most of us, at some time or other, have a feeling that something is missing. And we go searching, at least in our minds. It seems that we are not unlike the ancient Athenians. They were looking for something. They were a pagan society, and had erected structures to every god represented in their pluralistic society, even one "to an unknown god" to cover all the bases. Were they still searching? Paul seemed to think so.

Searching isn't a bad thing. It signifies that you care about deeper meaning. Are some quests more noble than others? Probably. Shallow goals typically produce shallow results. Fame and possessions, for example, don't usually yield deep satisfaction. Those pursuits, the shallow ones, can turn into idols when they replace the deeper searches for meaning. We Americans tend to be pretty good at the shallower pursuits. Ads reach into our need to seek something, but they generally offer solutions that aren't particularly meaningful. False idols. It's the easier road, but it isn't often fruitful in the long run.



What if we took Paul's advice to look for the God who is not far away, but actually close by? What if our inward looking led us to see the places in our souls where God has already been at work, stirring in us the desire for meaning? What if our outward searching led us to see the places where God has already been at work in the world? What if our searching could lead us to recognize meaning, happiness, peace, belonging, and all those other things we need, that aren't that far away at all?

In God we live and move and have our being. The object of our search is right here, with us and within us. [© Melissa Bane Sevier, 2011, Contemplative Viewfinder](#)

- 1) Christ, their Advocate, will send another
- 2) Christ, their life, will continue with them, even when he's gone
- 3) Christ, their calling, will be loved through obedience

[Lectionary Notebook, Mark Powell](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Father, words can't express my thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit. I know that even when I am by myself, that I am not alone. I know that when earthly friends forsake or those close to me betray me that your Presence is my Helper and my Friend. Thank you. Please forgive me for not seeking this Friend's help and support in times of trouble. Please make the presence of this Friend very clear as I live my daily life. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

[Heartlight.org](#)

Reflecting on the Word

Word

1st Reading: Acts 17:22-31

In his lecture in Athens, Paul mentions "the objects of your worship." What are some of the objects of worship for people in our culture? In Athens Paul begins to tell them about the living God with an inscription from one of their altars—"to an unknown god." What are the "points of truth" from which you can start to communicate the gospel to those in your world? What are ways that you might be tempted to compromise the message of the gospel as you communicate it to certain people? How do you need to better prepare yourself to effectively communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ to those to whom God has called you to minister? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Psalm Reading: Psalm 66:8-20

The writer calls us to action. What all does he call us to do? How are each of these behaviors related to the experience or the expression of joy? What this section of the psalm tell us about the cause for this particular expression of joy? How might this kind of experience lead to joy? Verses 16-20 are a more personal account of what the Lord has done. What does the writer say the Lord has done for him? What other ways of expressing joy to God would you add to the psalmist's list? Why is it important to allow ourselves to experience and express joy? How might this psalm help you to experience and express joy? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

3rd Reading: 1 Peter 3:13-22

In spite of godly living, Peter knew that Christians may encounter hardship. What counsel does Peter offer for coping with suffering? Why might unbelievers be willing to listen to reasons for hope from a person who is living the way Peter describes? Verse 18 is a "capsule" description of Christ's work and purpose. What all can you know from this verse about why Jesus came and what he accomplished? How could setting apart Christ as Lord, as verse 15 commands, help you endure suffering? Our world is often unjust. Bring to mind some of your past or current sufferings. In the context of these sufferings, how can the picture of Christ portrayed by this passage bring you hope? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

4th Reading: John 14:15-21

According to Jesus, how will the Spirit bring comfort and help to his followers? What is the relationship between our love and obedience to Jesus and his love and presence in our lives? How does the peace Christ offers differ from that which the world offers? Think of a friend who is going through a personal crisis. How could this chapter help you to minister to that person? How can Jesus' words help you in a personal crisis or when you have a troubled heart? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

*"The Holy Spirit
will always point
people to the
finish work of
Jesus"*

~ John Paul Warren



In today's Gospel, Jesus is preparing His disciples for the day when He will no longer be with them as a physical presence. This is the feast we will celebrate on Ascension Thursday - when we recall the moment when Jesus seemed to part from His disciples - and from the world.

One of the hardest things to do is to part from those we love. Even harder is to let someone go upon whom you have come to rely. The disciples knew where they were with Jesus - inasmuch as anyone can know where they are with Jesus! They had seen the great things He had done - and found that they shared some of His gift for healing and proclaiming the Kingdom. He had conquered death - and they assumed He would be with them forever.

They must have wondered what would become of them once Jesus was gone. Jesus gives them a promise. He is not going to leave them as orphans with no-one to protect them. He will be with them - but not in a way that the world can see or recognise. Instead, He will be with them in His Spirit.

This is the Spirit of love and truth which comes from the Father and the Son - the third Person in the communion of love we call the Trinity.

Through this Spirit, we are able to enter into the divine life. Those who love God and follows Jesus' commands will know and be loved by God - Father and Son in their turn.

They will be in God - and God will be in them.

This is an extraordinary privilege. How can mere mortals be part of the eternal and divine? And yet such is the promise made by Jesus to His friends.

"On that day, you will understand that I am in My Father - and you in Me and I in you."

Try using the phrase "You in me - I in You" as a mantra. Repeat it over and over in time to your breathing. See whether it helps you to come to sense the truth in Jesus' words. Once you get used to it, this is a prayer for any time - and place. [Well Spring of the Gospel](#)