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Sunday 14th May 2023

The Sixth Sunday of Easter

The Rev’d Anne Sardeson

Call to Worship

Come now to worship God - the Giver of Life,

the Ground on which we stand, the air we breathe, the love that we share.

Come, let us worship God, here with us now, and always.

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Living God, it is so easy to praise you sometimes.

For we look around and we see your wonder everywhere:

in the love of friends and family

in the wonder of nature

in words that encourage and cherish

in stories of joy and love.

Living God, it is easy to praise you sometimes.

Living God, it is hard to praise you sometimes.

For we wonder at what is happening

in the pain of our world

in the unsettledness of our lives

in the uncertainties we face

in the fear that grips creation.

Living God, it is hard to praise you sometimes.

In all timed and in all places

let us seek your strength and your continued presence,

and let us remember your promises.

Help us recall what you have done.

Living God, it is easy to be your people sometimes.

our hearts are full of love,

our words encourage,

we know how to serve you.

And then at other times it is so hard.

We know those times so well,

our discouraging words,

our thoughtless actions.

We lay them before you and trust in your mercy.

*silence as we recall the ways we fail God.*

Living God, you are merciful. Hallelujah!

In Christ Jesus you lived among us, full of grace and truth.

To those who had fallen you reached out a hand.

To those who thought themselves unworthy you spoke a word of love.

To us now, in our lives, you say again that we are forgiven.

Help us receive your forgiveness, strengthen us to forgive ourselves,

teach us to forgive one another, and let us live in peace.

Living God, you are our God, and we are thankful for your compassion.

Strengthen us for your call on our lives, and open us now to your Living Word this day.

In the name of Jesus, our crucified and risen Lord, Amen

All Age Ideas

link with Acts reading.

Look at newspapers and or articles from the week – consider:

* what make us stressed?
* how would we speak in places where we wonder where God is?
* who/what do we see that is very different from us?
* where do we see God?
* how does God help us to live in the world we find ourselves in?

Conversation about how we live with people who are very different to us:

* ask people talk about friends that they have who are very different from them (no names) and say what brings them together.

“Window on the world”:

* make a cardboard “window” (traditional style with four square panes)
* imagine looking through the window for your prayers.
* or take it to the window of your church and see what you see.

Readings

Acts 17:22-31 | St John 14:15-21

Sermon Notes

*We are preparing ourselves for Pentecost, when we will celebrate again that God breaks into our time and our place again and again…how do we prepare? By making sure we are open…*

*Acts 17:22-31*

Acts - “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit (Justo L. González)

*Paul in Athens*

* back story is important - why is Paul there? (to wait vs. 16)
  + important to read the back story in the rest of the chapter
* vs. 16 – Paul’s distress
* vs 17 – 21 – the conversations and arguments with the Jews, the “devout people” and the Greek Philosophers. (What are they about?)
* the “speech” – the focus of the story Luke is telling us about Athens Luke only tells us what is new in each place….
* Athens - a great history, but not what it once had been:
* one of the poorest parts of the Roman Empire
* population in decline
* but still an extraordinary place – ancient glory remained.
  + a place of great temples
  + also a place of philosophy - great thinking and talk (which Luke seems to be dismissive of in vs. 21)
  + different philosophies vying for hegemony (vs. 18) trying to win people to their way of thinking
  + a place of debate – so they debate with Paul
  + a place of curiosity

Paul is called a “babbler” (vs. 18). Babbler = “spermologos”

* those who collect ideas and join them together without any particular sense of wisdom
* they are curious, so they take him to the Areopagus – the hill north of the Acropolis where the court stood, but not to try him, just to listen him.
* A place of finding out.
* a place to feed the curious mind.
* a place of many cultures with a Jewish diaspora
* Paul is able to talk with Greeks and Jews

How does Paul get from his distress to such wisdom?

* + unpack Paul and Gentiles….
  + Paul has been trained to loathe everything he is among - it is no wonder he is outraged.
  + vs. 22ff are the equivalent to Peter’s vision and subsequent actions in Acts 10. Paul’s eyes are opened to where God is at work!
  + this is the Holy Spirit at work in Paul
  + transforming: the Spirit, it seems is at work and “calls him to a new word.” Willie James Jenkins: ‘Acts’ (Wille James Jennings “Acts”)

Paul does something stunning with his outrage:

* he does not turn away and hide and wait for his friends to take him to the next place
* he reaches out and touches and holds those who he has been taught to believe are untouchable.
* he gives the hearers a chance to hear and receive the invitation of God to them: “Paul’s words will join the synagogue to the marketplace, encircling all the creatures that traffic these sites with the love of God” Willie James Jennings “Acts”.
* not a mission “tactic” but an act of love and outreach
* driven by the “irrepressible longing of God to embrace wayward creatures by every means possible.” Willie James Jennings

A question for us: what do you do when you are among those who are radically different to you? And more: not just radically different, but those you have been taught to loathe?

Themes in this story

* inclusion
* being open to where God is and where we find ourselves
* not panicking when we get destressed but opening ourselves to God even then.
* the unknown God – what does it mean to acknowledge God being unknown?
  + what does it mean to “know” God? is that ever possible –
  + What does Paul discover about the unknown God?
  + the compassion of God for an ignorant world
  + the need to turn around (repent) from ignorant ways.

*John 14:15-21*

* part of a longer conversation
* a promise of Jesus to his struggling disciples
* disciples in a time of fear and uncertainty
* an affirmation of love
* the spirit unknown by the world but known by the people of God
* the spirit revealing the truth about God
  + what is to be revealed?
  + Preparing for Pentecost - what does it mean to prepare for this gift?

Prayers of Concern and Commitment

Dear God, we thank you that you reveal yourself in the wonder of nature,

in seed and shrub, in fruit and flower.

We thank you that all creation teaches us of your ways.

We prayer with our precious earth.

With the groaning of creation and the pain of misuse.

We give thanks for those who work to challenge our part

in the fractures of our world,

and pray God’s wisdom and courage to do more than we already do.

Dear God we thank you that you reveal yourself in our community.

in people and places, in the strange and familiar.

We thank you that you are not limited to that which is like us.

We prayer with our precious community.

With the needs that we are all too aware of and the ones we miss.

With the ones we can reach and the ones we cannot.

We pray Dear God that we will be open to all you are doing,

and dare to get involved.

We prayer with those who are precious to us.

Members of our faith community who are struggling at this time,

those we know well and those who are less well known.

*space for silent or shared prayers*

Dear God, we thank you that you reveal yourself in us,

even when we do not feel worthy or able or ready.

You have plated your seeds in our hearts,

and called us to bear your image in the world.

Give us the courage we need and help us care for each other

so together we will tend the seeds you have planted.

We give thanks for all that you give us and offer now all we can to you,

our prayers, our lives, our gifts of money and so much more,

accept now all that we offer,

We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ,

knowing that you hear us better than we can pray.

Blessing

*Invite the congregation to turn and face the door for the blessing so they are looking out to the world where they are called to love and bless.*

The blessing of God, known and unknown,

be with us and the world this week.

Guide us in our distress,

strengthen us in our hope,

and lead us in your peace. Amen

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| **Hymn Suggestions** | | | | |
|  | RS | CH4 | StF | MP |
| Be thou my vision | 489 | 465 | 545 | 51 |
| Living God your joyful spirit | 530 |  |  |  |
| Jesus Christ is Waiting |  | 360 | 251 |  |
| Look around you, can you see? (Kyrie eleison) |  |  | 525 |  |
| O Lord all the world belongs to you | 90 |  |  |  |
| Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you | 591 | 191 |  | 115 |
| God’s spirit is deep in my heart | 576 |  | 404 |  |
| Come with me come wander |  |  | 462 |  |
| Lord for the years | 603 | 159 | 470 | 428 |
| There’s a spirit in the air | 329 | 616 | 498 |  |
| Sent by the Lord am I |  | 250 | 239 |  |

**Music Ideas**

The Rev’d Malcolm Fife has composed a new tune for the hymn Living God, Your Joyful Spirit, which you can hear here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5li2nef1rw>

Use Thomas Tallis’ *If Ye Love Me* This version by the King’s Singers is very good.