

Easter 6



May 5, 2002

Prayer of the Day

O God, from whom all good things come: Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to think those things which are right, and by your goodness help us to do them; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Acts 17:22-31

{22} Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. {23} For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. {24} The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, {25} nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. {26} From one ancestor he 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, {27} 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. {28} For '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. {30} While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, {31} because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

22. the Areopagus: The Areopagus may mean either Ares (Mars) Hill, or possibly the Council of the Areopagus, an aristocratic council that advised the king on religious, judicial, censorial and political matters. The latter was the view of the Church Fathers; the former is generally accepted today. The events leading up to this event are in verses 17-21.

extremely religious: Literally, "rather demon fearing." Though probably intended to be flattering to the Athenians, it has an ironic flavor for Christian readers.

23. an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god": No such altar has been found, but such altars are mentioned in Greek literature. [1] This altar provides Paul with his starting point in his explanation of his new teaching.

What...you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you: Paul's preaching to the Athenians is not strictly a philosophical presentation, nor is it a sermon (*kerygma*) like that preached to Jewish audiences.

24: Freely based on Isaiah 41:5; 1 Kings 8:27. See also Acts 7:48.

26. From one ancestor he made all nations: The oneness of humanity is emphasized, "though the Greeks did not have the idea of a First Man from whom all humanity was descended...." [2]

28. "In him we live and move and have our being": "If Luke had any model for the tricolon he uses, it has not survived." [3]

some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring.": This quotation is from Aratus (*Phaenomena* 5), a Stoic poet born about 315 b.c.

29. 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: See Isaiah 40:18ff.; 46:5-6; Wisdom of Solomon 13:10-19 for similar thoughts.

30-31: God has overlooked human ignorance in the past, but now he has fixed a day of judgment,

and appointed the judge. The proof is in the resurrection! In the next verse we are told that when they heard of the resurrection they dismissed Paul, though a few did become believers.

Psalm 66:8-20

{8} Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard, {9} who has kept us among the living, and has not let our feet slip. {10} For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. {11} You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; {12} you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place. {13} I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows, {14} those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when I was in trouble. {15} I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah {16} Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me. {17} I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my tongue. {18} If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. {19} But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer. {20} Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.

8-9: The singer calls on the "peoples" to bless God because he has protected them, that is the people of Israel..

10-12: God tested Israel, but in the end kept them "among the living" and brought them out "to a spacious place."

13-15: The singer vows sacrifices to fulfill the vows (s)he has made.

15. *Selah*: "Selah" is used in verses 4 and 7, as well as here. The following verse invites others to see, hear, and praise God for what he has done.

16-20: (S)he calls the people together to hear that God had "not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me."

1 Peter 3:13-22

{13} Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? {14} But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, {15} but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; {16} yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. {17} For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. {18} For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, {19} in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, {20} who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. {21} And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, {22} who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

14-15: "These verses, along with v. 16, explain how the Christians are to react to suffering imposed on them because of their faith ['on account of righteousness'].... The first element in that reaction (v. 14b) is to be lack of fear, expressed here in the form of a double prohibition ['do not fear or be distressed']. The second element (v. 15a) is to be faithfulness to Christ as Lord, again expressed in the form of a command ['sanctify'], followed by an explanation (v. 15b) of how that faithfulness is to be carried out, namely, by a readiness to explain what it is that causes them to act as they do. How they are to carry out that explanation ['with gentleness and reverence'], and its intended result ['that...those who abuse you...may be put to shame'], is then given in v. 16." [4]

16. "...the context presumed in 1 Pet 3:15-16 may be that of a formal inquiry before officials and...the conduct described thus refers to the Christians' demeanor in the presence of investigating authorities...." [5]

17. *better to suffer for doing good...than to suffer for doing evil*: Another turn on an old theme (1 Peter 2:20).

18-22: Perhaps based on an early Christian hymn or creed.

19. *the spirits in prison*: Those who lived before the flood. The Creed confesses that Jesus "descended into hell," and some ancient traditions assert that there he preached to those who had died without faith, and even enabled them to believe and be saved.

Christians do not endure unjust suffering because of stoicism, or blind obedience, or even to imitate Christ's suffering. "Rather, Christians can endure such suffering because they can look beyond it to their sure redemption achieved by Christ's self-sacrifice." [6]

John 14:15-21

{15} "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. {16} And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. {17} This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. {18} I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. {19} In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. {20} On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. {21} They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

15. *my commandments*: Especially the new commandment, "*that you love one another*" (13:34).

16-17. *another Advocate...the Spirit of truth*: "Another" of the same kind (like Jesus). An advocate is one who speaks on behalf of a person. Jesus is identified as a *parakletos* (advocate) in 1 John 2:1. The other Advocate is the Spirit of truth in contrast to the devil, the "father of lies" (John 8:44).

You know him: The disciples know the Spirit of truth because the Spirit "abides with you." *abides*: "John uses the word [remain, abide] to indicate loyalty or deep attachment...." [7]

with you: "Among you" (plural).

18. *I am coming to you*: This does "not refer to some final return of the Messiah with power....

Rather, this return of Jesus is a Johannine description of the disciples' altered state-of-consciousness experience. That is why they can 'see' Jesus after he departs. The 'world' (Israelite society) will not be able to see Jesus in this way, but his followers will (v. 19)." [8]

19. *the world will no longer see me*: On Thursday we will celebrate the festival of the Ascension of our Lord, the return of Jesus to the heavenly kingdom and the right hand of the Father.

21. *They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me*: Those who love Jesus, who are in a close interpersonal relationship with him, are those who keep his commandments (especially the new commandment Jesus gave his disciples), to love one another (John 13:34-35). Love among the disciples is the confirmation of their relationship with Jesus. In 1 John 4:21 the elder wrote, "those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also."

21. *reveal myself to them*: Jesus revealed himself to Mary Magdalene (John 20:16-18), to the disciples (20:19-29), to Simon, Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John and two others (21:1-14), after he had ascended. [9]

Reflection

Paul's sermon on Mars Hill begins with a description of God which was not offensive to the Athenians, and ends with the resurrection which caused them to sneer and dismiss him. There are things about Christianity that non-Christians agree with, or at least don't reject outright, but it is teachings like the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, which are not rational, which distinguish between believers and "cultured despisers," or uncultured ones for that matter. These are matters of faith, not reason or demonstration.

The Gospel for this Sunday continues last Sunday's Gospel. "The structure of the passage [John 14:1-31] is as follows: the phrase 'Let not your hearts be troubled' (followed by reasons stands at the beginning (vv. 1-4) and end (vv. 27-31) of the piece. It thus brackets off the passage. The body of the segment consists of statements or questions by three interlocutors followed by Jesus' response to each: first Thomas (vv. 4-7), the Philip (vv. 8-21), and finally Judas (not

Iscariot; vv. 22-26)." [10]

"The second part of Jesus' response [to Philip] is that he is in the Father, the disciples are in him, and he is in them as well. The close interpersonal relationship between God and Jesus includes the disciples." [11]

Hymns [12]

With One Voice (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement* 1991 (e.g. 725s) and *LBW* (e.g. 32).

E=Entrance; D=Hymn of the Day; I=First Lesson, P=Psalm; II=Second Lesson; G=Gospel

515 E--How Marvellous God's

299 D--Dear Christians, One

298 D--One There Is,

153 II--Welcome, Happy

785v II--Weary of All (810s)

741v II--Thy Holy Wings(792s)

747s II--This Joyful (676v)

478, 354, 558, 354, 538

Prayers of the People [13]

P or A: Let us show our love for those whom Christ has taught us to love by offering our prayers for their needs and our own to God saying, "Hear us, O God," and responding, "Your mercy is great."

A: You gather a people for yourself of those who are saved by baptism and faith. Increase the faith of your church that all may give faithful witness to your resurrection and presence in this world. We pray especially for all who preach the Word of God and all who witness in action and living. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

A: We pray for the leaders of this land and all other lands, that their hearts may be open to receiving your spirit of Truth and that truth's way in their governing may not be blocked by worldly ambition and desires. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

A: We pray for all seekers and inquirers, those who are groping for God and searching for the one in whom we live and move and have our being. May our church be a place where they and their questions are welcomed and met with honesty, gentleness and reverence. Bless all catechumens preparing for baptism or affirmation of faith. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

A: Jesus longed to be able to gather his followers together in safety as a mother hen gathers her chicks. Give strength, courage and love to all mothers and assist them in the task of caring for children. Bless them with joy. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

A: We pray for those who turn to you for healing, especially we name _____. Sustain the courage of the persecuted and oppressed. Comfort all who grieve and engrave your promise of eternal life on our hearts. Hear us, O God. Your mercy is great.

P: Teach us your Great Commandment of love and let the Spirit guide us in praying for all that is needful. We give thanks for the witness of your saints. Like the apostle Paul, inspire us to serve you as unfailingly, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Or [14]

Presider or deacon

God has grafted us to the vine of the house of Israel. Let us offer prayers to God who gives life and breath to all human beings.

Deacon or other leader

For this holy gathering and for those who enter our circle of faith.

For the newly baptized illumined by the light of Christ.

For all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For the leaders of the nations and for all who seek peace.

For the suffering peoples of the world.

For those who experience desolation and for those who feel remote from God.

For the sick, the dying, and the dead.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Lifting our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, who gives us confidence and hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In your tender love, hear our prayers for all the world and grant us the power of your abundant and life-giving Spirit. Glory to you for ever and ever.

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Notes

[1] Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*.

Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987, pp. 140-141.

[2] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1998, p. 609.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 610.

[4] Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996, pp. 231-232.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[7] Bruce L. Malina, Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998, p. 55.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 232.

[9] Jesus told Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father" (John 20:17), but he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side" (John 20:27). Clearly between the two events he had "ascended to the Father," though it means something other than what Luke has in mind in Luke 24:51 or Acts 1:9-11.

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 230.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 231.

[12] <http://www.worship.ca/text/rc1a0102.txt>

[13] http://www.worship.ca/text/inter_a2.txt

[14] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>