

May 17, 2020

What Do We Need? Based on Acts 17:22-31

Prayer:

Dr. Bonnie Henry, our Provincial Health Officer has gained huge popularity during this Pandemic Crisis. Her calm demeanour and sincerity are the exact combination of attributes we need in leadership today.

During one of her many press conferences recently when she was discussing the phased in removal of some Public Health Orders, she kept coming back to the statement, “remember to ask yourself what is it I need versus what is it that I want.” She gave several examples. If you are planning a wedding, can you get by with a few close friends in your back yard rather than a gathering of 100 people in an event centre? Do you need to drive across Canada to attend a large family gathering or can it wait until next year? Dr. Henry is asking us to reduce risk by making sacrifices; needs vs. wants.

This week I listened in on our Regional UC Town Hall meeting facilitated by our Executive Minister Treena Duncan. She offered an update from the Executive Leadership Team, specifically regarding the reopening of church buildings and a resumption of worship.

As far as worship is concerned, the executive (in agreement with the National UC office) is recommending we continue to suspend all worship at this time. The risk of spreading the virus is just too great, in particular among congregations that have many vulnerable individuals like us. In the discussion came the reminder of our pastoral responsibility as a faith community. And, akin to Dr. Henry’s statement we were asked to carefully consider **“what do we want vs. what do we need.”**

I know what I want. I want to be back in the sanctuary looking out at all your smiling faces. I want to share spirit blessings with everyone. I want to share some good news through reflections, and I want to sing some loud Hallelujahs. I want to share a few laughs and sit with you over coffee and a piece of cake. And, I am missing my weekly dose of Hugs, and I want those back. I want all of that back.

A couple thousand years ago give or take, Paul stood on a hill in Athens and boldly spoke to the crowd gathered there about wants and needs too. It is not phrased in exactly that way, but Paul is asking them to choose. Will you continue to choose idols as your religious practice or will you seek what is truly divine, the love of the One God and the truth and life we see in the resurrected Jesus through God.

Paul had not been to Athens before and he is struck by so many idols which they worshipped. The Greek as we know worshipped many Gods; in this reading even one with an inscription "To The Unknown God." It was as if they wanted to be sure they covered all the bases, so as not to be condemned for forgetting some important deity.

Paul's message is "you are missing the mark." Boldly, for he was a stranger here, he informs them that God ***"does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath." "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.' 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."***

What the early Greek civilization assumed was that they needed temples of worship and idols bronzed and gilded to please the Gods. They were fearful of upsetting a deity lest they fall victim to his or her wrath. But God is not found in things Man Made. God is not found in a temple. God is not influenced by offerings of the rich and powerful.

God does not only listen to the elite. God has ears to hear all prayers, arms to hold anyone in a healing embrace and a spirit that can convey love in any and all circumstance.

In him, **In God** we live and move and have our being. Let the "stuff" go Paul is suggesting, what you need is in your midst. The instructions came from the man Jesus, God's flesh and blood. He taught kindness and generosity, and preached healing and forgiveness. Live in that way and God will be among you always.

I think those are incredible words, **in God we live and move and have our being**. I think we tend to forget that sometimes. We have a tendency to get caught up in assumptions.

We are missing much not being able to congregate these days but God, the Holy Presence, the Creator and Recreator, the source of life itself has not gone anywhere.

Our being together physically Sunday morning stirs up our enthusiasm. Belting out a favourite Hymn gives us a special kind of release and it makes us feel good. Sitting beside a friend helps us connect prayerfully. If we need a little comfort an embrace helps. Just being in the sanctuary provides spiritual nourishment. Those are all important, all life giving. Those are all reasons we want to be in worship together. But we can be with and in God, the Holy, regardless of where we are.

To say that we don't really Need to be at church, we just Want to, is quite bluntly absurd. I don't think it is fair to say that. But in this time when we can't be, we can't have what we truly want, what is important to remember is that our spiritual needs can still be fulfilled.

God works through us in so many ways. We can get pastoral care through phone calls or through a smile on a computer screen. We can be pastorally held up by a wave across the parking lot. We are remembering each other then and passing along that peace which is God's blessing.

When we look out the window or head out for a walk these days, we are greeted by a creation that says, breathe, look, listen, you are in this wondrous universe and the universe is in you. And this is a good time to remember the living resurrection as you gaze upon ma and pa Goose and their chicks. Thank you, God, for this day! (Just remember to watch where you walk)!

If you need to fill the air with music, go for it, who cares how it sounds. Sing the Hymns we have online even though there is no choir. Maybe sing them louder because no one can hear you! Make a joyful noise, it feels good.

Take some quiet time to reflect. That might mean just sitting for a few minutes with the TV off and your phone on mute. Maybe close your eyes and just be. Ask yourself how am I doing? What do I need at this time?

How can I obtain that? Perhaps offer a prayer, silently or aloud. It could be a prayer of thanks, a prayer for hope, a prayer for reconciliation.

And in the quiet still moments remember that we are never alone. It is a real disappointment we can't be gathered as we are accustomed, but God's light, love, hope and peace are with us always. We don't have to build idols or make any sacrifices for the privilege of being in the presence of the Holy. When we Need it, it is there. It is here now, with us in this worship time.

Thanks for listening this morning,

Amen