

Sunday, May 17, 2020 Sixth Sunday of Easter

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

Welcome:

We are sending our prayers, songs and psalm, readings and homily to you today, so that, even apart from each other we can still worship together. We sing, pray and speak of the hope that is ours in Christ and we cherish the presence of the Risen One in our midst. We are bold to speak and sing with profound joy, even in a time of sadness and fear.

We sing our Gathering Song, All Things Bright and Beautiful

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **Amen.**

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty and ever-living God, you hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In your great mercy receive the prayers of all your children, and give to all the world the Spirit of your truth and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

We sing a Song, Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil

First Reading: A reading from Acts 17: 22 – 28

Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 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. 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, 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.

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.'

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

We sing our Psalm, Path of Life, Psalm 16

Second Reading: A reading from 1 Peter 3: 13 – 16a

Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? 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, 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; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

We welcome the Gospel, singing, Be Not Afraid

Gospel: John 14:15-19

Jesus said to the disciples: If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 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.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you will also live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Homily:

In our first reading today, we discover that Saint Paul had a curious crowd to talk to at the Areopagus. They had lots of gods - plenty of them - one for every occasion. They even had a statue for an unknown god, in case they missed one. They were very spiritual indeed, though, in some ways they were spiritual tourists. They liked to talk about gods. It was one of their favourite pastimes.

Perhaps the people at the Areopagus were not that different from us today. Many say they are very spiritual, but not religious. You have no idea how often someone tells me they are not into organized religion. "I am not either," I tell them, "you should see my desk at Church."

Like the people at the Areopagus years ago, we too have plenty of gods that we worship. In our culture, money and prized possessions tend to top the list, but status and prestige are up there also on a pedestal. All of these things demand our time, devotion and energy. Sometimes they even become objects of worship and admiration. Of course, when we die all of them end up having very little significance, but most of us have not figured that out yet, despite all that Jesus has told us. Whether we like it or not, we are all involved in idolatry, some of us are just a bit more subtle about it.

How do we talk to people about Christ when we live in a world filled with other gods. How do we, in St. Peter's words, speak of the hope that is within us, in Christ. St. Peter gives us some

advice today. Speak the hope that is within you with gentleness and reverence.

St. Paul followed this advice when he spoke to the Greeks at the Areopagus. He respectfully addressed them with honesty about our faith, with gentleness and grace. Some were moved to faith. Some mocked him ...that happens, even now.

What matters to people, and what is noticed by non-Christians, is how we live the faith that is within us and how we live as those loved by God. When compassion and gentle graciousness are evident, our words are more believable – even in our cynical age.

The truth is, more people are attracted to Christ through our actions than through our words. We hear in the Acts of the Apostles that people were attracted to Christianity because the Church was concerned for the poor and all in need. It brings to mind some advice from one of the Fathers of the Early Church: “Proclaim the Gospel. Use words when necessary.” In our time and place, it is really important that our words match how we live as a community of faith, as people who place all our trust and hope in Christ.

It is not always easy to speak of the hope that is within us. I have seen people roll their eyes at funerals when I spoke about the resurrection and our hope of eternal life in Christ. Sometimes it will take all the compassion and the integrity we can muster for the task of speaking and living our faith and we cannot expect our words and work to be warmly welcomed by all. Jesus never told us it would be easy. Nor did he call us to be always successful, just faithful.

It is good to remember that when all is said and done it is not about our words and work anyway. The Holy Spirit is at work, calling and moving people to faith through what we say and do, even when what we say and do looks inadequate, in ways that we could not have expected or predicted. This we celebrate with joy as we live and share our faith in Christ, in whom we live and move and have our being. **Amen.**

We sing a Hymn, He Comes to Us As One Unknown

Prayers of the Faithful:

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join all of God's children, in all times and places, praying for the church, the world and all who are in need.

Abiding God, you have revealed yourself to us in your Son, Jesus Christ. Embolden your church to reveal your love to everyone in our words and in our living. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our world, troubled by illness, plagued with fear and despair. Grant wisdom and skill to all who work on vaccinations and treatments, and watch over those who are ill and those who care for the sick. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our loved ones who we cannot be with us this Easter season. We pray for all in our parish who are mourning and all who are ill, or troubled in body, mind, or spirit. Grant them healing and peace. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, grant us, gracious God. Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer that you have taught us: Our Father, who art in Heaven...

Blessing: May Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us always in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

We sing our Sending Song, Christ is Alive, Let Christians Sing

Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God