

The Lectionary with Vicar

The appointed readings for this upcoming Sunday are taken from Acts 17:16-31; I Peter 3:13-22; and John 14:15-21. I encourage you to open your Bibles and read through these passages with me.

Acts 17:16-31

Today we read the story of Paul preaching in Athens. In this sermon, Paul highlights two seemingly contradictory aspects of God's relation with humanity. On the one hand, God is a transcendent creator God who is far above humanity. He rules over history and cannot be approached or known by humans. On the other hand, God is our loving Father who is near by us and cares for us each individually.

Most people are familiar with the stories of the Greek gods, but few know much about this unknown god. Some assume that they had an altar like this just in case there was a god they didn't know about in order to avoid offending him, but in fact, the unknown god in Greek mythology was a specific god – he was the one who created the world and ran everything. He was significantly more powerful than any other god in the Greek religion, but they didn't really worship this god, because he was far away and unknowable. Paul says that this powerful, creator god is in fact the God we worship – the one who created everything and reigns supreme. He was talking to them in terms they understood.

But this God that was otherwise unknowable Paul says is known. Paul is talking about the way that God reveals Himself to His people in scripture. He describes God as a loving Father who is not far off from us. What Paul is trying to say is, this God that you worship even though you don't understand Him has actually revealed Himself and wants to be known by you. So, we are left with a kind of paradox – a God who is both far off, powerful, and unknowable but who is also close by and fatherly.

I Peter 3:13-22

Peter continues his letter by explaining how Christians share in the sufferings of Christ. He begins with an exhortation to do good. Although Peter says a person should not suffer for doing good, he realizes the world doesn't always work that way. He points to the example of Jesus who suffered even though He lived a perfect life. Based on that example, Christians should be willing to suffer, but continue to do good, so that we can be above reproach, even when we are suffering for doing good.

From this, Peter moves into a discussion of how we participate in the life of Jesus. First, Jesus died for us. Then, Peter says, we also die along with Jesus when our sinful self is drowned in the waters of baptism. So, we, like Jesus, "are "put to death in the flesh." When that happens, we are then pulled out of the water and given a new life, just like Jesus was raised from the dead. So, we, like Jesus are "made alive in the spirit." When we are baptized, our lives are joined with Jesus, so that we die and rise with Him, drowning our sinful nature, and receiving new life.

John 14:15-21

Finally, in our Gospel reading, we read the Words of Jesus from the Last Supper. In this section, Jesus tells His disciples that He is their bridge to the Father. Here we see the answer to the paradox of our reading in Acts – the distant creator draws near to us in Christ Jesus. As we participate in the life and death of Christ, as we “abide” with Christ, to use His words, we also are close to the Father. When we are made one with Christ through out baptism, we are made a part of the relationship between the Father and the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit, who Christ sends us.

Our first reading introduced us to the paradox of a simultaneously distant and close God. Our second reading told us how we become one with Christ through our baptism. Our Gospel reading then tells us that if we are indeed one with Christ, we are one with God, because it is through Christ that we can see and know God. As we participate in the life and death of Christ, we grow closer to the Father, and through out participation in His death, we will be raised to new life with Him and the Father forever.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, through baptism you have mad us partakers of Your death and resurrection, grant that we may live lives that demonstrate to others Your constant presence as we are filled with the Holy Spirit that You have sent in order that we may continue to abide with You and with the Father in love, until You come again to restore all this fallen creation. In Your name I pray. Amen.