



Sunday 17th May 2020

Sixth Sunday of Easter

**The Beacon Parishes Mission Community of Ipplepen with Torbryan,
Denbury, Broadhempston and Woodland**

FIRST READING

Acts 17.22-31

Then 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. 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, 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. 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."

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. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 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.'

PSALM

Psalms 66.7-End

who rules by his might for ever,
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—
let the rebellious not exalt themselves.

Selah

Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard,
who has kept us among the living,
and has not let our feet slip.
For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.
You brought us into the net;
you laid burdens on our backs;
you let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

I will come into your house with burnt-offerings;
I will pay you my vows,
those that my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
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

Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for me.
I cried aloud to him,
and he was extolled with my tongue.
If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.

Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me.

SECOND READING

I Peter 3.13-End

Now 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 defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; 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. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. 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, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, 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 people, were saved through water. 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, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

GOSPEL

John 14.15-21

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

'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 for ever. 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 also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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.'

A REFLECTION BY REVEREND TONY MEEK

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus said to his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments". In the Epistle of Peter we are reminded of the importance of doing good with gentleness and reverence, keeping our conscience clear, despite any consequent suffering, abuse or intimidation.

Our first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles, giving us some of St Paul's wisdom. I sometimes wonder what it would have been like to hear Paul preach. I find the reports of his preaching in the Acts of the Apostles rather easier to follow than his own letters. I think St Luke had a clearer style of writing than St Paul. It is probable that, like many effective preachers even today, Paul spoke in that captivating and charismatic manner which cannot easily be reproduced on paper. Paul had the gift of immediate identification with his audience. As with comedians and other performers today he began with a reference to their home city, in this case Athens. We will all recall examples of modern politicians 'on the stump' getting this hilariously wrong!

Paul fastened on that 'altar to an unknown god' and showed the people of Athens that, even in their very sophisticated and well worked out theology, they had left a gap where fresh air could blow in from an unexpected quarter. Paul has found an open window in the Athenians' culture but he does not slip cautiously inside. He blows in like a hurricane, telling them that their unknown god is in fact the creator of the universe. He tells them that, up until that time, God has been quite tolerant of their ignorance. But that now, he commands all people everywhere to repent. The day of judgement has been set and the judge has been appointed.

When Paul spoke to the people of Athens, he - and those of them who believed him - thought of that day of judgement rather as we might now think of the day when the present pandemic will be a horrifying memory. When that time comes we will feel that a hurricane has thundered through our lives. An increasing number of commentators from all faiths and none are pointing out that the 'new normal' will or should never replicate the 'old normal'. Let us take this time to reflect on our true priorities. Keep safe.

Reverend Tony Meek