

Sunday Morning Meditation

May 17, 2020 – Sixth Sunday of Easter

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“In Whom do we live, move, and have our being?”

Scripture Passage – [Acts 17:22-31](#)

I cannot help but wonder what it must have been like for Paul to preach to the philosophers in Athens. Preaching to his Jewish brothers and sisters in the synagogue, as Paul had done from the beginning, was familiar. Paul himself was Jewish and had been a Pharisee. Paul understood how Jews thought and why they believed what they believed. For Paul, entering into discussions with Jews regarding religion would have been like cousins arguing about whether the best NFL team was the Redskins or the Cowboys. Even though those passionate fans follow different teams, they did both follow the same sport. (Actually the Vikings are the best, but I digress.) But the Athenians, well they knew nothing of Paul's God. They were like cousins from another country who have no interest in football.

But now Paul finds himself in Athens, wandering about the city. As he goes from street to street in the ancient agora surrounding Mount Olympus, Paul becomes increasingly agitated. Not angry, as if he wanted to strike out at the Athenians, but more like disturbed by what he sees and scared for the people behind what he sees. Paul cared. Yes, Paul can come across like a grumpy old fundamentalist, but Paul's style is more about the culture of the times than it is about who Paul was as a person. Paul cared so deeply for the people of Athens, that as he walked from Temple to Temple, he became more and more heavy hearted.

It was as Paul reflected on an altar, that he found the common ground from which to proclaim the gospel to the Athenians. There was an altar that was dedicated “To An Unknown God”. To the best of our knowledge, this altar in Athens was sort of the final, catch all of altars. Most Athenians at this time were polytheists; meaning they worshipped many gods, even gods outside the Greek pantheon. Like most polytheists, the Athenians believed

that the more gods the merrier, or at least, the more gods one worshipped the more one covered the proverbial bases of life.

So, this catch-all altar “To An Unknown God” became Paul’s starting point for making the God of the Old and New Testament known to the Athenians. And, like any good theist, Paul begins at the beginning. Paul declares that it was God who created the heavens and the earth. And as such, this God who possessed the intelligence and the creative power to make the heavens and the earth, cannot be contained in some temple made with human hands or even served by human hands, as if suggesting that this God was in some way lacking or deficient. No, this God Paul speaks of is not like the trite and temper-mental gods of Greek mythology who need to be waited on hand and foot in order to have meaning and even survive. No, the God of the Old and New Testament is vastly more powerful than these other gods. These other gods, who need human attention and service, seem to be nothing more than glorified humans who are contingent on other realities. Paul’s God is not contingent or dependent on any thing or any one, rather Paul’s God is the one who gives life and meaning to every thing in the created universe.

But what is so amazing in Paul’s description of this powerful and lofty God, is that this God desires to be known by humankind. This God, Paul said, created humankind so that people could search for and find God. Paul even emphasized that such a process of searching would not encompass any great feats, for God is near at hand to all people. So, no Homer and the odyssey are necessary. This God desires to be known, not unknown. So great is Paul’s God’s desire to be known, that Paul boldly proclaims that: ***‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’***

In other words, this God is so foundational to all of reality, that our very lives are lived in him. Whether the Athenians know it or not, their being is founded in God. As beings who are made in the image of God, our being, our essence, the very reality that makes us human, is founded on or based on God because God made us and God made us in God’s image. Our being is not separate from God’s being. Our being is directly dependent on God’s being and God’s creative power. But that is not all. Our very lives are founded on God. Not just our being, but the life that our being experiences and lives in space and time is dependent on God because God breathed the reality of life into humankind. And as if all of this is not enough, Paul also said we move in God. So, our walking and talking, our

laughing and crying, the very movements of our lives, are lived in God and dependent on the grace of God.

Wow, that was a mouthful that we can and should chew on for the entirety of our lives. But for Paul, his point is simple. In as much as the Athenians think that their lives are based on these gods they know by name, their lives are not based on those gods. Their lives, as Paul suggests elsewhere, are also not based on their national identity or their amazing culture or accomplishments. Their lives are based on the God who was unknown to them, whom Paul is making known.

This passage challenges us to consider on what reality do “we live and move and have our being.” Just because we know this unknown God, it does not mean that we automatically “live and move and have our being” in God. We can have our lives and moving and being in many realities. For some people, they “live and move and have their being” in their family. Their family, both their immediate family and their extended family and their family history, are the center of their lives. They live vicariously through the lives of their children giving all to them. They revel in their family’s accomplishments and in their family history. They spend more time on Ancestry.com than in God’s word. They “live and move and have their being” in their family. Others, and as you know I believe this is the most critical issue facing the church in the USA, far too many people “live and move and have their being” in their country (or at least in their party). The love that they have for their country rivals the love they have for God and God’s people. In some instances, their love of country surpasses their love of God and God’s people. Their devotion to country is so deep that the simplest questioning of their country will result in a passionate rebuttal, and yet a denial of central doctrines of their faith is met with indifference. John Piper, the famous Baptist preacher, tells the story of how on one fourth of July Sunday service the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” was played on the piano and there was hardly a dry eye in the sanctuary. But later, when the first verse of “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” was played on the organ and then the remaining verses sung, there were no tears shed. Dr. Piper went on a 10-minute rant relative to what he witnessed. Living in the midst of a culture marked by materialism, nationalism and militarism, we may indeed find ourselves “living and moving and having our being” in “other gods”. So, this passage challenges, just as Paul intended it to challenge the Athenians, in real existential manners. On who, on what, do we “live and

move and have our being.” This might be the most pressing faith and life question we can ask ourselves today.