

Sermon

The Rev. David Martin, Deacon

St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albuquerque, NM

Sunday, May 17, 2020

Acts 17:22-31 and John 14:15-21

Groping for God

[Heavy sigh.]

Let me tell you. It's difficult to attempt a Sunday morning sermon sitting at home with only my husband. I can't see your friendly faces. I can't see you nodding in agreement. Nor can I see you falling asleep or scrolling through your phone if I'm way off the mark. I've got no feedback. I've attempted several different methods of giving a sermon this week – sitting, standing, backgrounds, props....you name it. But I've settled on doing what some of my youngest friend think I do pretty well. We'll see how it works for us today. Let us pray.

Gracious God, be with us all as we examine your word. Help us to adjust to this new way of being your church during these uncertain times. Send your spirit to help us understand what you are saying to us...what we need to hear. Amen.

In the reading from Acts today, Paul is in Athens. As he awaits Silas and Timothy to join him, he plays tourist and walks around the city....taking in all the sights. He's dismayed by all the temples to idols and, being the talkative evangelist he is, Paul gets into conversations with the locals about their customs and their religious practices. Just a few verses before what we read today, Paul was accused by the locals of being a "babbler" – talking incomprehensible nonsense when he proclaimed the Good News of Jesus. But in those verses, we also hear that the Athenians are very interested in learning new things. So they invite Paul to the Areopagus to tell them more. The Areopagus is a small outcropping of rocks not far from the Acropolis. It was a meeting place for discussions, councils, and courts.

Uncharacteristically, Paul is rather kind and gentle to his audience. He compliments them on being extremely religious. He notes he even saw a temple with an altar dedicated to "an unknown god." Paul uses the opportunity to tell them that God is NOT unknown. Paul can tell them exactly about the one and true God. Paul makes it clear God does not live in shrines made by humans. God made everything and therefore doesn't need us to create things for God. Instead of building all these temples and shrines, Paul suggest we are look for God - to GROPE for God. Grope is such an interesting choice of words. Grope means to. "feel about or search blindly with uncertainty".

But do we need to actually grope to find God. Because Paul then says the most important thing in this passage “indeed God is not far from each of us. For in God we live and move and have our being.”

I'd now like to share a story with you that I hope will be meaningful to all of us, no matter what our chronological age might be.

[Read aloud]

Maybe God Is Like That Too, by Jennifer Grant, illustrations by Benjamin Schipper:

*I live in the city,
where the sidewalks and subway cars
and buildings and buses
are packed with people –
but I've never seen God before.*

*“Grandma, does God live in the city?”
I ask one morning at breakfast.*

*“Yes, God is here,” she says,
“You just need to know where to look.”*

*“Whenever you see love, joy, and peace, God is there,”
she says, stirring her tea.*

*“Wherever there's patience, kindness, and goodness, God is there, too. When you see
faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, that's God's Spirit at work.”*

*On the way to school, I'm on the lookout.
I see a bus full of tourists
and count ten bright yellow taxis.*

*I spy a man sweeping a stoop,
and Grandma and I laugh
when we see a tiny dog
wearing a fluffy, purple sweater.*

*At school Grandma hand me my lunch
and hugs me close before she says goodbye.
That's what love look like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*On the swings, I pump so hard
I see over the wall into the alley.
My friends shout, "Higher! Higher!"
as my feet fly way up into the sky.
That's what joy look like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*Outside, car horns blast
and sirens scream,
but my classroom is quiet and calm.
That's what peace looks like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*I try to tie my shoes,
but the laces tangle around my fingers.
My teacher sits down beside me
and shows me how to tie them.
That's what patience look like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*On the way home, I see a doorman
wearing a red cape and a hat with a shiny brim.
He's holding the door for a man using a wheelchair.
The man moves very slowly, and the doorman
chats with him and smiles.
That's what kindness looks like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*While I'm setting the table for dinner,
there's a knock at the door.
It's our neighbor from downstairs,
bringing us a loaf of bread.
It's golden brown and warm and
wrapped in a thin, white towel.
That's what goodness look like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*After dinner, I work on my homework
while Grandma stands at the sink,
washing dishes
and humming to herself,*

*just like she does every night.
That's what faithfulness looks like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*At bedtime, Grandma sits
at the edge of my bed, singing me a lullaby
and stroking my head.
She tucks my blankets up close around me.
That's what gentleness look like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*I lie in bed, watching the curtains flutter.
I want to talk about that dog we saw today
and how high I can swing but
Grandma says that once I'm tucked in
I have to stay in bed until morning.
I close my eyes and try to fall asleep.
That's what self-control looks like to me.
Maybe God is like that too.*

*I saw God over and over again today
whenever I saw love, joy, and peace,
and whenever there was patience,
kindness and goodness.
When I saw faithfulness, gentleness,
and self-control, I saw God's Spirit at work.*

*I don't see God
the way I see my friends
or the streetlights
or the river,
but I see sign of God's Spirit
all around me,
right here in the city*

*I know what God is like.
Maybe I can be like that too.*

*"The Fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness, self-control" [Galatians 5:22-23a].*

Paul told us that God is not far from us. In God we live and move and have our being. Our friend in the book found that out as they paid attention to their world one day.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his friends that although he will physically be leaving them, they will not be alone because God is going to send them the Spirit of Truth who will always be with them. In our story we heard the Grandmother say at breakfast that God's Spirit is at work among us. As our friend is falling asleep he now realizes he sees signs of God's Spirit all around him.

Do we accept that God's Spirit is at work among us?

Do we see signs of God's Spirit in the world around us?

In these past two months of isolation, anxiety, disappointment, grief, and uncertainty it may be difficult to see God's Spirit who, as Paul says "is not far from each of us." God knows that when we are feeling down it is difficult to realize God's presence among us. But God is here and God is patient. So don't give up. Keep groping. Grope as long as you need to. God is not far and you will find God.

In sharing lunch with someone, in swinging high, reading a book in a quiet place, helping someone with a difficult task, seeing someone be kind to someone else, sharing your baking with a neighbor, doing your homework, washing the dishes, singing a lullaby, falling asleep.

In God we live, and move and have our being. So God is right here with us every second of every day. And it's OK if you don't see that all the time. Just don't give up looking.