

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 10th May 2026
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Collect

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us
from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us
he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

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.’

1 Peter 3:13-22

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.

John 14:15-21

'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.'

Post Communion

Bountiful God,
whose Son Jesus Christ
gives the water of eternal life:
may we thirst for you,
the spring of life and source of goodness,
through him who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

Sermon

We all know, don't we, that there are two subjects that are never to be discussed in polite company, and especially not, for example, at a dinner party. Those two subjects are, of course, politics and religion. We can probably understand why, since it can sometimes feel as though any conversation on either of these two matters can rather easily become heated, and on occasion undignified. While there may be some of us who are quite comfortable with a robust exchange of opinions, others can find it deeply uncomfortable. And so, if in doubt, we stick to talking about the weather, holidays and anything uncontentious.

The only thing is, that should probably sit a little uncomfortably with us. After all, if no-one had ever said anything about religion, how would any of us have found our way to the church? I expect that at some point in each of our lives, the subject has come up. And by the same token, how can other people find out about why we think faith has something to offer if we never dare to mention it? In Matthew's gospel, we hear that great commission to the disciples, which we also need to hear for ourselves: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." These words of Jesus are important and I don't think they can be easily ignored. They speak, essentially, of sharing the good news with others because we believe that it matters and can change their lives.

The question, though, is really about how we do that. How do we make disciples of all nations. How do we teach others. How do we share the good news. And this is where I think that each one of this morning's readings has something so helpful to offer.

Let's begin with the reading from Acts of the Apostles. Paul is in Athens, at the Areopagus, which is a hill northwest of the Acropolis, and served in antiquity as a meeting place for the supreme council and homicide court. It was, therefore, a place of significance, and somewhere Paul might find an audience for what he had to say.

I love Paul because he was never afraid to say what he thought, and indeed what he believed people needed to hear. In Acts, we usually find him quite simply preaching the gospel, seeking to persuade his hearers that the good news could be found in following Jesus. But of course it isn't quite that simple. In this morning's reading, his audience is largely made up of Greek philosophers, and so the message Paul offers is tailored to what he believes they will understand.

In the Areopagus he has seen an altar to an unknown God, and he takes this as his starting point, seeking to persuade his hearers that the God they consider to be unknown has in fact been seen on earth in the person of Jesus and can be known personally.

It is impossible for us to know whether his hearers found Paul's message convincing, but it is wonderful to see the way he constructs his argument, and what he considers it important to emphasise. Paul wanted his hearers to know that God is not distant, but can be known by each one of us personally. In what he says, he speaks of God as the creator, and describes each of us as God's offspring. The God of whom Paul speaks is undoubtedly relational, and also powerful.

I really want to encourage you to take some time to study this reading from Acts in the coming week. As I have read and re-read it, I have spent a great deal of time asking myself what I would have said in Paul's position. I just love the way that he sought to make a connection with his listeners. The sense of God as being in relationship with us resonates strongly for me, and I also like the way Paul speaks of us groping for God – that sense of searching is something I recognise. There are other things that Paul says that aren't quite the way I see things. I think it can be important to be honest about where we find that words and ideas in the scriptures are uncomfortable. It's through prayer, conversation and reflection on such things that we sometimes grow.

If the reading from Acts is the first example of how we might share the good news, the words of 1 Peter help in a very different way. This reading contains one of my personal favourite verses in scripture: "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.” In many ways I seek to make this a touchstone of my ministry. The message of our faith is one of hope – a message that I believe the world desperately needs to hear. And the challenge from Peter is how each of us might share that message. What is the hope that you find in your faith? How is it that you can share that hope with others? What I especially love about the way the verse is phrased is that this is not about standing on a street corner and forcing our ideas on unsuspecting passers by. This is about that time when someone genuinely wants to understand why it is that we go to church; what it is that we find in faith that matters in our lives. And Peter advises that as we seek to explain, we should be gentle and reverent. It’s a reminder not to force our ideas, while also recognising that this is not something flippant. If we dodge the issue, or deflect the conversation elsewhere, perhaps we are selling ourselves and God short.

As is so often the case with John’s gospel, it doesn’t give a straight answer to the question of how we share the good news, but provides some rather beautiful poetry. It speaks of the importance of loving God, and that part of the way that we love God is by keeping the commandments. I think that this is helpful to us as we consider the ways in which we share the good news, because in many ways the lives that we live are the greatest testimony to what we believe.

This coming week we will celebrate the Ascension, when the resurrected Jesus is lifted up into Heaven. In John’s gospel more than anywhere else in the scriptures, Jesus seems to recognise how hard it is for each of us to live out our lives of faith, knowing the depth of God’s love for each one of us, when we don’t have Jesus physically next to us, telling and showing us. The reassurance that he offers is of the Holy Spirit, indwelling in each one of us as a reminder of God’s everlasting presence and love.

The thing is, though, Jesus kept talking about it because he knew how hard it can be. It was hard for those first disciples, who had initially spent time with Jesus, and no doubt felt his physical absence keenly. And it is hard for each of us, too. Being prepared to give an account of the hope that is in us when there are times that so much that is happening in the world seems rather hopeless.

And that is why I see this morning's readings as so helpful. Because they show us different ways in which the good news might be shared. And they invite us to consider how we might do the same. One of the reasons that I believe it's so important is because we don't just share the good news to bring others to faith. We also do so because it helps us to grow in our faith. As we examine what others have thought, said and done, we can prayerfully consider our own perspectives, sometimes alone, and sometimes with others. And as we do so, we grow ever closer to the God who loves us.

Amen