

BIBLE READINGS: Acts 17:22-31 John 14: 15-21

SERMON

Too often in our modern world-view, we tend to view God as somewhere out, over, or up there. In some sense, we place an imaginary distance between ourselves and God in an attempt to describe a real difference between ourselves and God. We are not God this much is true.

Yet, Paul tells us in one of my favourite passages from Scripture, “In God we live and move and have our being” (Acts:17:28). This means when we use a false sense of distance to describe a real sense of difference we do ourselves and God a disservice. In the preceding verse (27) Paul says “...indeed God is not far from each one of us.”

It's important to remember that Paul is not speaking to a crowd of Christians in this passage.

He is speaking to a crowd of Athenians – he is speaking to and about every human being when he says “...God is not far from each of us...for in God we live and move and have our being.”

Everyone at one time or another has felt or sensed something that is both mysterious and awe inspiring. It might have been hiking or camping, walking or running. It might have been the sight of a beautiful woman, a handsome man, a garden, or a landscape.

Whatever it was it caused you to breathe in deeply and to be thankful. In that single instant, you were fully and completely alive and could feel it from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. In the words of Jacob Boehme – at 17th century Christian mystic, “I am a string [*instrument*] in the concert of God's joy.” To celebrate the gift of life and the wonder of living is to be touched by the presence of God, whether we know its source or not.

In our day and age people have taken to calling it “spirituality” by which they mean some general sense of realization that we are a part of something greater than just ourselves.

Most people naturally know or at least are able to learn what it means to enjoy life, its textures, sounds, colours, aromas, and flavours – we know how to receive the good gifts that life has to offer. However, in order to see God in the details – in the smile of an old woman or a little boy – we need a helper.

This is true, according to John's gospel, even after we have heard the word of the Lord, sat at the feet of Christ listening to his teachings, or sitting at the table with him and sharing his bread. We need a helper to remind us that we live every moment in the presence of God.

The Gospel of Thomas is what we call a non-canonical book of the Bible so we don't read from it during a service of worship. Having said that, there is a parable within it where Jesus says,
“The kingdom of God is like a woman carrying a jar of flour. As she was walking along the road, but was still a long distance from home, the handle of the jar broke and the flour began pouring out along the roadside. She didn't realize the flour was spilling out behind her as she walked along, so when she arrived at her house and set the jar down, she was shocked to find the jar was empty.”

What is the point of this strange story?

Why is the kingdom of God like a jar emptying itself unknown to its transporter? Most of us would consider this a story of loss. However, the kingdom of God turns the world upside down. Jesus, the vessel, being carried by his disciples, unknown to them, is pouring himself out. He emptied himself for our sake and for the sake of many others. It is for this reason that we are given the Holy Spirit. We are to walk as Jesus walked, love as Jesus loved, forgive as Jesus forgave, and pour ourselves out for the sake of others.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. There's not a lot of leeway in that expression. Breathe deeply, enjoy life, and be thankful – even in the midst of adversity. Love others, even if they don't know how or simply refuse to love you back, and wrap yourselves up in God's comforter.