

**Opening Prayer**

**Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.**

**Acts 17:22-31**

<sup>17:22</sup> Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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, <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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.' <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> 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."

**Commentary**

Paul began his speech at the Areopagus (either the city council or courthouse) by telling the Athenians he could tell they were very religious. He had been around the city and noticed all the temples and altars, including one to an unknown god. Paul told the Athenians he could reveal to them the nature of this unknown god. What did he tell them about this unknown god? First, Paul said, God made the world and everything in it. Therefore, God does not live in

human shrines or need anything from human beings, since God is the source of all that is. Second, God made all nations from one common humanity. Third, God determined national boundaries and fixed the time the nations would live in them, which refers to Deuteronomy 32:8. The Greeks also believed their place in the earth came by divine appointment. Perhaps Paul was trying to speak to his sophisticated Greek audience in terms they already understood.

## **Reflection**

Paul began by mentioning the unknown god. If you were addressing a group who were hostile, skeptical, or merely bored or indifferent, how would you go about proclaiming the Gospel?

## **1 Peter 3:13-22**

<sup>3:13</sup> Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? <sup>14</sup> 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, <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup> 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 persons, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup> 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, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

## **Commentary**

We can actually rejoice in suffering, Peter says, if we do it because of goodness. If we suffer as Christ suffered, we can also be a part of Christ's redemption. Peter also refers to the ark of Noah and those saved from the Flood. That event, he says, is like baptism, a saving act. When Peter says we are saved in baptism, he does not mean there is something magical about the sacrament, but that baptism is a part of God's power for our salvation. The response to God's

saving act is the “appeal to God for a good conscience” (v. 21), which means a commitment to live out our baptism in the world.

### **Reflection**

Have you ever felt that any of your suffering was God’s will? Have you ever had to suffer for doing good?

### **John 14:15-21**

<sup>14:15</sup> "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup> In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> 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."

### **Commentary**

John teaches that the disciples (and Jesus’ faith community) can be in relationship with the Father and the Son after the Resurrection and Ascension, but this relationship only exists within a community of faith. Once more we see that there is no rugged individualism about faith in the New Testament. It is always a faith of the community, rooted in the community, nourished in the community, lived out in the community. Jesus makes the promise to the community, not to individuals. In this model of love, the relationship between Jesus and others can grow beyond that first community and include us. The relationship depends on the presence of the love of God in the life of the community. That love is present wherever those who love Jesus keep his commandments.

### **Reflection**

How do we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life?

- 66:8 Bless our God, O peoples,  
let the sound of his praise be heard,  
9 who has kept us among the living,  
and has not let our feet slip.  
10 **For you, O God, have tested us;  
you have tried us as silver is tried.**  
11 You brought us into the net;  
you laid burdens on our backs;  
12 **you let people ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and through water;  
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**
- 13 I will come into your house with burnt offerings;  
I will pay you my vows,  
14 those that my lips uttered  
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.  
15 **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***
- 16 Come and hear, all you who fear God,  
and I will tell what he has done for me.  
17 **I cried aloud to him,  
and he was extolled with my tongue.**  
18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened.  
19 **But truly God has listened;  
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.**  
20 **Blessed be God,  
because he has not rejected my prayer  
or removed his steadfast love from me.**

**Closing Prayer**

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.**