

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 forever. 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.”

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.”

Sermon

It is that time of year once again, a season of graduations from every level of school, kindergarden, elementary to middle, middle to high, college graduations, and high school graduation like the two young women we are celebrating today. It is also a time of fear and sadness for many parents who see the commencement celebration as the beginning of the end. Their children are all grown up, many of them will be leaving the nest, all of them will be finding more freedom, whether it is in college or in the work world. And with this new freedom, parents are like Paul in Athens, they see and are troubled by the great many idols that their children will face in the world.

We worry about the idols of higher academia, those of the work place, and those of social locations of young adults. Are our children going to get lost in the partying, in the freedom to play games all night long, in the drive to earn more money above all else, in unhealthy relationships. Are they going to lose their religion, their moral core, and become something different than what we raised them to be? And this is not a new challenge to parents and communities. This has been a fear since at least the time of Paul.

Paul has been traveling throughout the Mediterranean world, sharing his message of God's salvation through the resurrection of Jesus. That is when his journey brought him to Athens, and it is in Athens that he encounters a pantheon of gods, each of which have been given great statues and shrines. And it is in his great speech given at the Areopagus that he points to the altar with the inscription "to an unknown god". Though Paul has been frustrated and worried about what he sees as an idolatrous city, he also is inspired their faith. "I see how very religious you are in every way." And in this altar to the unknown god, Paul sees a genuine seeking and searching for the one true God, it is God's plan that all people "would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him - though indeed he is not far from each one of us."

In all the fear and anxiety in what our Children seem to be losing, the truth is, it has always been this way. Throughout history, a part of the maturing process has been to move from accepting what others have told us to be true, and to seek for what we believe to be true. Not only is this a part of a normal cycle of life, but Paul believes that this is God's plan, that all people will seek and grope and, perhaps, find God. And that is true for us all, that there is an itch, a desire, and need within each of us to seek deeper understandings of the mystery. There is something with each of us that is in awe of the beauty and power of creation. There is something with each person that works to understand love and hate, joy and pain, life and death. It is in our created nature to seek after the one who created us. This has driven not only our faith, but our art and our science, our literature and society. And though it may seem more acute for our young adults, we are all caught up in this great search of meaning, that is God's plan so that in searching we might find the one who has always been near.

Jesus reminds us just how near God is to us. Our text from John's gospel today comes during the time between Jesus' resurrection and his ascension. He is preparing his

disciples to continue this ministry that he has begun. And in this preparation he says that he will not leave them abandoned. So often in our own walk of life and faith, we can feel like we have to go it alone, make it up for ourselves, and we worry about what that means for young people as they begin their next part of life in school or in the work world.

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate who will be with you forever.” This Advocate, this Spirit of truth, this Holy Spirit, is given to us all as we seek after God. It is the Holy Spirit that whispers to our hearts and nudges us along our path. It is the Holy Spirit that calls to us and gives us courage and embraces us to give us comfort. And it is the Holy Spirit that acts through us as we seek to be God’s hands and feet in the world.

All of us, young or old, all of us have a natural instinct to search for deeper meaning and to look for the source of life. May we not hold back that instinct, but boldly embrace our own seeking and nurture the pursuit of faith and knowledge within our young people. For the Holy Spirit is already at work, and the unknown god is not far from us at any time. Seek and you shall find. Amen