

The Sixth Sunday of Easter – Sunday 14 May 2023

• Acts 17.22-31; Psalm 66.7-19; 1 Peter 3.8-22; John 14.15-21

Commandments in John's writings are more than moral precepts but involve a whole way of life in loving union with God, through Jesus his Son. Keeping God's commandments is maintaining our relationship with God, initiated and maintained by the very gift of God himself to us through the sending of the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit, we know the Father and receive Jesus his Son. We can then live because Jesus lives in us.

- We give thanks for the gifts from God through the sending of the Holy Spirit: knowing God, living in God, living in the life which is in Jesus.
- Give thanks for the work and witness of the Church of Ceylon.

Text: Michael D St Paul's Cathedral, Sale © Anglican Board of Mission, 2023

Reflection

The Rock of Ares, the Areopagus, near the Acropolis, was a magnet for educated Athenians. At the very heart of Athen's historic (even in Paul's time!), civic and cultural centre, amongst temples and the high court, people gathered to philosophize, debate, theologize, explore, and articulate values and meaning.

Paul was a man of the moment. He listened deeply to the people he was addressing and the way they addressed matters. He heard what was important to them, and their concerns and questions. Paul spoke with the gathered community, rather than at them. He made use of their vernacular to change their perspective. In this significant reading, we glimpse his ministry and understand his missional practice.

Filled with God's Spirit, Paul spoke with clarity and purpose. He held his audience. Paul took the opportunity to proclaim the 'known' God, Creator of all in heaven and on earth, who is in the past, present now, and will be in the future, long before any one of those present. Shockingly, he also said God was not in shrines or temples made by human hands because God didn't need them! Paul introduced them to God who seeks a relationship with all people and all creation. This very inclusive God loves beyond nationality or culture. God is active, living, vibrant, engaged, and relevant in everyday life, for every individual and every community. 'In God, we live and move and have our being', resonated with immediacy and the future.

Wonderful, life-changing, prophetic, educative ministry
from this man with a mission.

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HOLY INNOCENTS

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Sentence

'Those who love me will keep my word,' Jesus promises, 'and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.' *John 14.23*

Collect

O God,
you have prepared for those who love you
joys beyond our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love for you,
that, loving you above all else,
we may obtain your promises
that exceed all we can desire;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

First Reading: Acts 17.22-31

²² Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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, ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ 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."

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has

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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.’

For the word of the Lord, *Thanks be to God.*

Psalm 66.7-19

⁷ O bless our God, you peoples:

and cause his praises to resound,

⁸ Who has held our souls in life:

who has not suffered our feet to slip.

⁹ For you have proved us, O God:

you have tried us as silver is tried.

¹⁰ You brought us into the net:

you laid sharp torment on our loins.

¹¹ You let our enemies ride over our heads,

we went through fire and water:

but you brought us out into a place of liberty.

¹² I will come into your house with burnt-offerings:

and I will pay you my vows,

¹³ The vows that opened my lips:

that my mouth uttered when I was in trouble.

¹⁴ I will offer you burnt-offerings of fattened beasts,

with the sweet smoke of rams:

I will sacrifice a bull and the flesh of goats.

¹⁵ Come then and hear, all you that fear God:

and I will tell what he has done for me.

¹⁶ I called to him with my mouth:

and his praise was on my tongue.

¹⁷ If I had cherished wickedness in my heart:

the Lord would not have heard me.

¹⁸ But God has heard me:

he has heeded the voice of my prayer.

¹⁹ Praise be to God:

who has not turned back my prayer,

or his steadfast love from me.

life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹ let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’ ¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ 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, ¹⁵ 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; ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ 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. ²¹ 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, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

For the word of the Lord, *Thanks be to God.*

Gospel: John 14.15-21

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

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2nd Reading: 1 Peter 3.8-22

⁸ Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹ Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For ‘Those who desire