

Sermon – God’s Offspring  
Scripture: Acts 17:22-31, John 14:15-21  
Sunday, May 14, 2023  
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Springfield, Illinois

Our first scripture reading is Acts 17:22-31. Paul, speaking in Athens, makes concrete confessional claims about Jesus in response to the vague, amorphous religious inclination of his listeners in Athens who are immersed in Greek culture and mythology. Hear now God’s Holy word.

*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, God who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 25 nor is God served by human hands, as though God needed anything, since God's own self gives to all mortals' life and breath and all things. 26 From one ancestor God made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and God 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 reach for God and find God—though indeed God is not far from each one of us. 28 For "In God we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are God's 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 God commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because God has fixed a day on which God will have the world judged in righteousness by the one whom God has appointed, and of this God has given assurance to all by raising Christ from the dead. Amen.*

Our second scripture reading is John 14:15-21. This is a continuation of Christ’s Farewell Discourse and the first of four teachings in John’s gospel about God’s spirit. Jesus names the spirit as “Advocate,” from the Greek word *parakletos*. Jesus reassures disciples of all times and places with the promise of the “Paraclete” – a companion, advocate, and counselor. In the absence of Jesus’ physical presence, followers of Christ receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in which *they live and move and have their being*. The spirit empowers those with whom the spirit dwells to speak and to live Christ’s love. Hear now God’s Holy Word.

*15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and the Father will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees the Spirit nor knows the Spirit. You know the Spirit, because the Spirit abides with you, and the Spirit 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. Amen.*

The title of the meditation: God's Offspring

*The text: 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. Acts 17:29*

Let us pray. Holy Creator God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we gather as your offspring on this Mother's Day with grateful hearts for those who have given us life and who have enriched our lives along the way. And now, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen.

A question in a recent lesson from the Disciple Fast Track Bible Study I lead on Thursday evenings asked participants to name those who have made a sacrifice on their behalf. The first person that came to mind was my dear, Dutch mother, Betty Jellema Denham, not only because she brought me into this world, but also because she gave up some of her dreams, desires, and wishes to provide a loving, reliable, honest presence for me in our home during my formative years.

In so many subtle and unacknowledged ways, my mother's presence in my life exemplified the God *in whom we live and move and have our being*, the God we know whom the Apostle Paul compares with the Unknown God of the Athenians. Our God is not a deity of gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. Our God is not unfeeling and detached from humanity.

The God to whom we belong, the God whom Paul so beautifully makes known is the One who gives us life, the Creator of all things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small. The God whom Paul so beautifully makes known is the One who joined us in this life, whose feet walked the long dusty roads and the hill to the cross. The God whom Paul so beautifully makes known is the One who abides within us as the Spirit of truth and our companion, advocating, encouraging, and counseling us to be the hands that serve and the hearts that forgive as the body of Christ. (pause)

On Friday evening, Peter and I attended Cultural Night for the SIU School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics, chaired by Dr. Doug Carlson. The evening was hosted by the Jedi Committee which stands for Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Peter and I walked into a room bursting in color by tables adorned with clothes each shade of the rainbow amidst residents and faculty dressed in bright traditional clothing. The room was also exuding with the aroma of rich and culturally diverse food representing the nations from whence these doctors have journeyed to the heartland of Illinois for the purpose of perfecting the practice of medicine.

In a brief presentation, a young resident from India expressed gratitude for the affirmation she experiences in the inclusive work environment at the medical school and shared research that supports there is increased productivity and creativity as well as improved cultural awareness in inclusive workplaces.

Highlights of the evening included greetings from a mom of one of our mosque friends in Children of Abraham and the musical trio of Meredith Volle and her daughters Evangeline and Mae, dressed in matching pink, and singing their family song honoring Mother's Day.

The diversity in the room was beautiful. I could not help but reflect on how we are all God's offspring and what a gift it is to celebrate the beauty of each one and all of us rather than be

afraid of those who are unfamiliar and unknown. In a time of growing white, Christian nationalism and the fear of the other in our society, on this Mother's Day let us affirm together that we are all God's Offspring. Each person, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability, religion, national origin or political belief, is known and cherished by the One who created us and who believes we are beautiful.

Carole King's song, Beautiful, is a reflection about how our self-perception affects the way we treat others in the world.

*You've got to get up every morning with a smile on your face and show the world all the love in your heart. Then people gonna treat you better. You're gonna find, yes you will, that you're beautiful as you feel.*

According to Carole King, Beautiful is a simple message about loving oneself, and in turn, showing such affection to others in the world around us. In her 2012 book, Natural Woman: A Memoir, King writes that it was while she was riding the New York City subway system that she learned how her view of herself has a direct impact on how she treats others. Although it's been years since she rode a BMT train, Carole King still believes this Subway Lesson is as true as it was the day she learned it. Everyone is beautiful in some way, and by seeing the beauty in others, we make ourselves more beautiful.

Perhaps nothing is more beautiful than the body of Christ when we live up to the hope and the call as God's Offspring. With hands that serve, with hearts that forgive, and with feet that bring good news, may each of us honor the God from whom we come, the God to whom we return, and the God in whom we live and move and have our being. Amen.