### “In Him We Live” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 14, 2023

**Acts 17:22–28**

22Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 23For 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. 24The 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, 25nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. 26From 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, 27so 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. 28For ‘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.’”

**John 14:15–21**

15 “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. 17This 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. 19In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. 20On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21They 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.”

Welcome, everyone, to First Church. As always we rejoice in our time together, and especially today on Mothers’ Day. We are blessed in our fond memories of family events and of receiving love from our mothers. And love, as we know, is the great commandment. Today we will hear more about the love commandment. In Acts, we see the apostles journeying throughout the Middle East, Asia Minor, and Greece spreading the joy of the love commandment.

Paul quotes the wisdom of the Greeks to make his point in Athens. He is sarcastic at one point, when he says “I see how extremely religious you are in every way” (17:22), but mostly he is willing to honor the Greeks while directing them toward monotheism. He quotes the Greek poet Epimenides, “In him we live and move and have our being,” and promptly moves on to quote the poet Aratus, “For we too are God’s offspring” (Acts 17:28) (Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 49–50).

He seems to be saying that Greek wisdom contained an anticipation and a hope for a message of salvation such as Jesus brought. He is treating Greek thinkers as similar to the Hebrew prophets, worth quoting for their truthful messages and anticipations. But, like the prophets, the philosophers were incomplete without recognition of the Messiah. Because Paul knows who the Messiah is, he has the power to “proclaim to you . . . what . . . you worship as unknown” (17:23). The dim groping after the truth can now be replaced with factual information about God and the one whom God sent. Paul lets them know that he has the answers they seek. They no longer need to worship just an *idea*!

Let’s look at the first of those Greek quotes: “In God we live and move and have our being.” In a spiritual sense, that is true. Materially, we live in the material environment, the social environment, and the physical body. But spiritually and in terms of personal relationships, which are fundamentally spiritual in nature, we live in God, we have our being, our personality, in God, in a God environment, so to speak. It seems that we get our uniqueness—what really makes us *who* we are—from God. And, spiritually, we are all children, or offspring, of God. Look around at your family members—all members of the family of God.

In addition, we are also all offspring of our earthly parents, our fathers and mothers. We all have a mother who brought us into the world and who was our first caretaker. On Mothers’ Day we traditionally give thanks to our mothers, and let them get away from cooking or other chores for one day. So we’ll do something like that today. Let us honor our mothers. Some are still with us, while some have passed on to the next life. All are memorable. All have taken on the greatest of responsibilities. We salute you! We thank you!

Now, back to the Acts text. Looking earlier in that chapter, we see two groups named in Paul’s audience, the Epicureans and Stoics. Epicureans put a value on friendship and loyalty, but they tended to be agnostic, as regards God or gods. The Stoics believed in God as Reason and Rightness. Some in the crowd, probably the Epicureans, call Paul a babbler, but the Stoics want to know more, saying “we would like to know what it means” (17:18, 20). Indeed, many Stoics would convert to Christianity. This story seems to reflect that situation where many Stoics were drawn to the Christian message.

Stoics already had the idea that each person was indwelt by the Logos, which was moral law and the power of mental discernment. They believed people could discern right from wrong because the moral compass of right dwelt within them. Stoics would then adjust their thinking when they heard the Christian teachings on Spirit. Their ideas would be Christianized.

But to a small degree, Christian ideas would be Stoicized. That’s how it works when ideas spread from culture to culture. On the intellectual level, it is *within* *ideas* that we live and move and have our being. Realms of ideas are affected by other realms and clusters of ideas. This is different from the insight that *in God* we live and move and have our being, which refers to the spiritual level, and to what nurtures our spiritual living.

Our gospel passage is one of Jesus’ intimate talks with his leading disciples. He tells them about the Spirit that he will send. Jesus calls it “another Advocate,” because he himself was the first Advocate. The Spirit of Truth that he will send will be similar to his own personal presence. Therefore he can say “I will not leave you orphaned” (14:18).

The Spirit will testify to the Son’s unity with the Father, but also to a unity between believers and Jesus. God and Jesus will reveal themselves to those who love them. Four long chapters of John involve Jesus giving messages like this so the apostles will know that they will be guided, and will know to trust the unity of Father, Son and Spirit. He called the spirit that he was to send, the Spirit of Truth.

This Spirit acts within the minds of believers to draw them to the truth, and to help them to recall his words. We weren’t there to hear those words in person, so we can’t recall his earth life, but we can *feel* the ring of truth when we read his words today. They resonate within us because of the Spirit of Truth, which is like a GPS system within us that assists us in perceiving truth, in learning to love and to keep his commandments.

Finally, this Spirit helps us to feel Jesus’ presence, and thus, not to feel alone. I think the Spirit works particularly well when believers congregate and seek to do God’s will together. There is both a personal and a communal aspect to this Spirit. There is a hymn that says “the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above” (“Blessed be the tie that binds”). There will be a Spirit-guided fellowship in heaven, of which we can get a foretaste here on earth. Haven’t we seen that “many hands make light work”? It is also true that, joined in Spirit, our tasks are lightened, and our joy increased.

We will love each other better when we are more sure of Jesus’ and the Father’s love for us. Even on this earth, Jesus and the Father will reveal themselves to us, which probably means reveal the reality of their love, and stimulate that experience in us. They probably don’t reveal other things, like the significance of the number pi. I’ve always wondered why that is an irrational number. What does it say about the relationship of the second dimension to the first dimension, or about the relationship between lines and circles? Well, it would take God to explain it, but that’s probably not what the Father will reveal to me, at least not any time soon.

It’s really all about love. Jesus says “those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (14:21). That’s enough for me, really.

Be ready for Jesus to reveal the Father’s love to you. Be assured you are loved. But God is love and in him we move and breathe. Breathe in God.