

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Year A

RCL

Acts 17:22-31
John 14:15-21



The Collect

O God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as surpass our understanding: Pour into our hearts such love towards you, that we, loving you in all things and above all things, may obtain your prom-

ises, which exceed all that we can desire;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and
reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one
God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Acts 17:22-31

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.”

John 14:15-21

Jesus said, "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.”

SERMON

I've been thinking about blessings recently. Not the usual things you might think of as blessings, though. What I'm thinking of is the blessing of living in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Not everyone gets to live in a 100 year pandemic, and that has been granted to us.

Now, before you start drawing up the papers to put the poor old gentleman in a comfortable home, hear me out. The blessing is that we are living in a time of correction if we will but pay attention. As John put it:

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Fa-

ther, 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.

We are torn in the tug between two teachings. The world teaches us that life consists of a selfish pursuit of well-being – me, me, me. The Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, speaks to us in correction – life is about care of others and the welfare of all. The world understands life to be a competition. The Spirit teaches us that life is compassion. In that tug between teachings, there must, inevitably, be an accounting. Today, we are blessed to be

given a view of the two teachings, side by side, so that we can more clearly see our error. We couldn't find a better example than a posting I read this week.

Ok I have got to vent before my head pops off. I was at a local restaurant picking up food. A lady who was standing near me said, "Excuse me but I am not trying to be rude but you're not observing the six feet rule."

He went on to say that he thought, "That cloth mask you have on is completely useless for your protection and if you are that scared stay home!!"

Here we have the two teachings side by side.

The teaching of the world is that wearing a face mask is to protect me from harm, so I have no right to impose my fears on you. If I am that scared, I should stay home. The teaching of the Spirit of truth is that since you can spread the virus even if you are asymptomatic, wearing a face mask and maintaining social distancing is an act of love for all humanity. The person to whom you spread it may or may not become ill, but may pass it on to someone who dies of it. If you maintain social distancing and wear a mask just so you won't get sick, you are giving heed to the teaching of the world – me, me, me. If you wear a mask and

maintain good social distancing out of love and concern for all of God's children you are giving heed to the teachings of Jesus – that each of us are given into the hands of the other to care for and protect. On the one hand are those who see the inconveniences of masks and social distancing as nonsense. If I get sick, I get sick. It's my body and my decision. On the other are those who see care for others as a social responsibility and an act of Christian love.

To those who heed the teachings of the world – that life is a selfish pursuit of personal well-being – the thought that we might be called upon to inconvenience ourselves for the protec-

tion of others is as foreign as hiccups to an oyster. Your needs are not my concern, or only of secondary importance to me. My concern is getting what I want. Jesus taught otherwise. When Jesus spoke, the world reacted just as you would predict, with condemnation. And so, there was a trial, but it wasn't Jesus who was on trial. What was on trial was the "way of the world", the entire structure of how the world is put together, and the verdict went against Rome. Jesus was raised. There is a standard of righteousness, and it isn't Caesar.

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.

With the death of Jesus, the world received a blessing. Played out before our very eyes, the assumptions of how the world functions was shown to be error, and with His resurrection, the world was shown the truth. A blessing is when God intervenes in a powerful way to show the error of our assumptions. That is why I maintain that we are being blessed. We are being shown the need for correction.

In 1914, mankind again heeded the teachings

of the world, resting their reliance on the power of their armies and forgetting the words of Acts.

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

Savagely, mankind tore at one another, killing some 16 million people before receiving, in 1918, a blessing in the form of the world-wide flu epidemic. The flu killed between 50 and 100 million people, as much as 1 of every 18 people in the world. It came in three waves. The first wave scared people and they avoided large gatherings and wore face

masks. Then, when that became tedious, they forgot their obligation to others. The second wave was much more deadly. Finally, in the wreckage of lives lost and economic disaster, mankind understood. As we are learning today, the virus is no respecter of state or national boundaries. Once again, we are being taught that only by loving our brothers and sisters can we be saved. Once again, we are learning that all mankind, no matter their ethnicity or location, are part of the family of God. We are learning that your “rights” are not superior to the welfare of others, but subservient to it.

“But”, I hear the protests, “I want to have a

Bud with my buds! I want to go to the beech! I want..I want..I want..”

The experts say that by relaxing our precautions, we will unintentionally cause more deaths. That is what happened in 1918-1919. Once again, we are tugged between two teachings – one selfish, the other selfless. Can we not learn from that? No, apparently we must witness the horrors for ourselves. The Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled this week that Wisconsin’s stay-at-home order is “unconstitutional and unenforceable”. Bars in Wisconsin opened immediately, welcoming crowds. The experts have told us what will happen. We

don't know how many will die, but we know what will happen – another blessing. Apparently, we cannot and will not learn except from tragic consequences. When I think of 100 million people in their graves following 1919 and the arguments over face masks today, I ask, “Must we do this again?” Can we not believe Jesus without the correction of more lives cut tragically short? I fear not.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

Chapter 17 of Acts, from which we have been reading, tells of Paul's trip to Thessalonica. After three days' argument with the Jewish community, tempers frayed.

and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king

named Jesus.”

A blessing occurs when we are given the opportunity to see the world turned upside down that we might correct ourselves. Today, I would like you to take five or ten minutes to meditate on some of the reactions we have seen to the suggestion that we should wear a face mask for the protection of ourselves and others and ask yourself, “What errors in our thinking do these actions reveal?”

I don’t want you to meditate on how evil are those people we read about who act violently. That is not your judgment. I want you to meditate on what errors in our thinking are being re-

vealed to us. It is a blessing to do so.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and
be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and
give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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