

## LECTIONARY GUIDE FOR ACTS 17:22-31 and JOHN 14:15-21

### Acts 17:22-31

In this narrative in the Book of Acts, we see Paul speaking to an audience in the Areopagus. Says Paul sarcastically, “*I see how extremely religious you are in every way.*” He then proceeds to show them how they are religious in the “Greco-Roman” way of religion with altars, one inscribed to an unknown god, shrines made by human hands, and statues created out of gold, silver and stone. But he, Paul, professes not an unknown god, but one, made known to his religious forebears and experienced still by any, who understand themselves as his offspring and seek God. Referring to familiar poetry, Paul sums up “*in this [God] we live and move and have our being.*” This is the God, who raised “a man” from the dead, and on an appointed day will judge who has been righteous.

### Five Questions

1. The Areopagus was not just a backwater place. It was the center of Athens, where Socrates had gathered his students for discussions and others had followed in his stead. So, when Paul himself is said to have spoken there, hearers, who were probably well-educated philosophers, understood the importance of his speech in that particular place. What places to us are like the Areopagus?
2. What does Paul, the first great Christian missionary, say about being religious to his audience? Does it mean that we believe something about what is ultimate in life, and display it at altars, on shrines or through statues? Does it mean that we believe in God but not necessarily use these more tangible forms in sanctuaries? Either/or, both/and? During this health pandemic, how important for us are tangible forms of worship?
3. To Luke, it was important to explain and trace Jesus’ genealogy. Is it important to us that we understand the history of Christ-- from the Abrahamic tribe to Joseph and Mary—to have greater trust and confidence in what we believe and what we do to show our faith?
4. Some have delighted in the description of God as the One *in whom we live and move and have our being.* (v. 28a) What meaning might it hold for you?
5. Judgment on an “appointed day” was important to Luke in the first century. Is judgment, judgment on a fixed day, or judgment for our thoughts and actions, important to us today?

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### **John 14:15-21**

Here Jesus knew that his hour had come. He tells his disciples that if they love him, they will do his commandments. Then he adds that he will ask the Father to provide an “Advocate” for them. This Spirit of truth will remain with them forever, abiding in them. In contrast, it will not be seen or understood by others since they do not believe in Christ. Repeating for emphasis, Jesus affirms that he will not leave his disciples bereft like orphans, but will leave to them his commandments, and be available in God, as he is in God and God in him.

### **Five Questions**

1. Like last Sunday’s Farewell Discourse we can hear that Jesus is soon to leave us. Eastertide is soon to end. Pentecost, the season of the Spirit, is about to start. How does it feel when Jesus tells us that he will be leaving us? Have we experienced a similar situation when someone whom we loved left us, or knew s/he was about to leave us...a grandparent, a parent, a child or a spouse? How did it feel?
2. Jesus says that his disciples are those who follow his Commandments. Can you name his two Commandments? Can you list the Ten Commandments? Which commandments emerge as most important to us, and how?
3. Jesus says that he will petition the Father for the provision of an “Advocate,” a Spirit, the spirit of truth, for his disciples. *Advocare* means in Greek to give a voice to, to advocate for. How do we understand the Holy Spirit? Do we think much about this person of the Trinity?
4. Here again we get a strong sense of John’s indwelling abiding theology. God because of Jesus Christ is reimagined. To wit: Christ dwells in God, God dwells in Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in God, God dwells in the Holy Spirit, Christ dwells in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit dwells in Christ. Is John’s pre-trinitarian notion helpful to our understanding of God?
5. How might this new image of God affect our lives? Was God as Creator, Christ as Redeemer, and Holy Spirit as Comforter helpful at times of anxiety when Jesus left earth. Is it helpful for us during this global health crisis?

### **PASTORAL PRAYER for the Sixth Sunday of Easter**

O God in whom we live and move and have our being,

You are a great and mighty God, we know,  
and not limited by time, place or circumstance.  
This day we ask affirmation of Your presence and power.  
For, we still encounter illness, fear, death and grief.  
We realize that though we are  
somewhat able to manage ourselves,  
our households, pets, yards and cars,  
we -- despite our best efforts -- are *not* able to control  
our public spaces, the Areopagus, in our lives,  
the markets, drug stores and shops,  
nor the statistics, curves and predictions,  
the antibodies, tests, and vaccines.  
So, help us, we pray.  
Help us to help ourselves.  
Help us to help front-liners and essential workers.  
Help us to help the unemployed and dis-employed.  
Help us to help our children and youth,  
even to celebrate upcoming graduations.  
Help us to help the ill and grieving.  
Help us to help our congregation and others.  
Help us to help our innovators and inventors.  
Help us to help those who work for peace,  
here and around our world.  
By helping, O God, we dwell in You, Christ and the Advocate,  
as You abide in each of us,  
not just in difficult times, but at all times,  
even when the sassafras' leaves finally sprout,  
citron-leaved hostas push through oak leaves,  
and iridescent hummingbirds return to birth.  
Give us resurrection out of death,  
and Your enduring hope out of pandemic.  
This we pray in our Savior's name. Amen.

*—Pastor Dianne*