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St. Timothy's Episcopal Church  
Calhoun, Ga  
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**6 Easter; Year "A" [CL]: Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 148:7-14; 1 Peter 3:8-18; John 14:15-21**

**Title: As the Rain Knows the Earth**

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**Sometimes we find ourselves speaking of extraordinary people who have done extraordinary things as heroes. Some heroes are fictional – like those found in comic books or movies featuring so called super heroes. Some heroes are very real. We remember, for example, the heroes that responded when called upon to fight against fascism and murderous ignorance.**

**One of our heroes in the Bible is St. Paul. As he moved around Asia Minor and beyond on his missionary journey, sometimes he would be well received but sometimes he would be threatened, imprisoned, even whipped or beaten. Sometimes he would see the hand-writing on the wall and just slip out of town so that he might live for another day.**

**It had become Paul's pattern in his missionary journey's to seek out the nearest synagogue in the town where he was visiting, and there he would engage the Jews concerning the man Jesus and how this Jesus had fulfilled the scriptures, albeit in ways almost no one had anticipated. And then only later would he seek out the non-Jews or the Gentiles.**

**In today's offering we find that since arriving in what was the large and culturally sophisticated city of Athens, Paul has been teaching and preaching in the synagogue as well as the public square. But now the philosophers have insisted that he come and address them and the crowds at the Areopagus. The Areopagus, or the Hill of Ares, was the site where the official Council met. The council had both legislative as well as a judicial function.**

**The picture that we have before us from the Book of Acts is, I think, quite idyllic. The philosophers and others gathered are said to "spend their time doing nothing except telling or hearing something new." .**

**We know from history that some pretty good size crowds would gather at these events anxious to hear orations - especially in larger cities. There were no movie houses. There were no newspapers. No TV. No Front Line on the PBS channel. No "Discovery Channel." .**

**So, we know that people would often gather in the town square to hear an orator or philosopher. This was a primary form of entertainment. Today's speaker was one Paul of Tarsus -- a Pharisee, a philosopher, a theologian, and quite curiously -- a Christian.**

**Oh, this oration was not to be missed. Word on the street was that in this person, Paul, they would find one worthy of their time and attention.**

**Paul was not only smart, he was crafty as well. If it was not Paul who said, "When in Rome," it should have been, for Paul would take whatever circumstance he found himself and work it to his advantage.**

**Here in this arena full of statues of Greek gods, he sees that there is one statue dedicated to the so called "Unknown God." It seems that just in case there was a god they had missed they would cover their bases by putting up a statue to The Unknown god. No sense in offending some god that you have inadvertently overlooked.**

**But we might not be too quick to find fault with this methodology. Consider that we often pray for forgiveness of sins that are known or unknown -- sins committed in any manner whether that be by way of thought, or word, or deed. And we seek forgiveness for things that we have done but also for that which we have left undone." I think that we could probably all agree that our Confession of Sin is pretty comprehensive; pretty much covers all the bases. And that's pretty much what the Athenians were doing – covering all their base's, by erecting this statue to the Unknown God. Ah, but what a golden opportunity for Paul.**

**"Friends, I see that you are very religious."**

**Now, you don't suppose that our Paul would be setting up his audience do you?**

**"But I also see that among your statues is this one to 'an Unknown God.' Well, I have brought you good news today. I know this God. His name is Yahweh and he is the creator of the world and everything that is in it."**

**But the phrase I want to focus on from Paul's speech is this one: In this speech Paul says of God, "In him we live and move and have our being." Scholars tell us that here Paul is quoting a 6th century BC poet by the name of Epimenides.**

**But regardless of who Paul might be quoting, he is beginning to introduce a new concept -- to talk about God, not as indifferent and far off, but he says of this God that he is as imminent and as connected to us as is a parent with their children. We can be in such deep and abiding relationship with this God that has heretofore been unknown to you that you might find yourself saying it that it is in this God that we live, and move, and have our being.**

**This, of course, is the same God that Jesus described as the vine grower. And he describes himself as the vine. And he describes those who abide in Him as the branches. This is no great mystery. Jesus is simply saying that when we are in communion with the Holy, and living lives in concert with whom and what God intended us to be, the relationship is as intimate as branches are to vines and vines are to branches. And that is the kind of relationship that God desires for us.**

**In that discourse of branches and vines Jesus uses the word "abide" no less than four times. And this same word shows up this morning as Jesus speaks of the coming Holy Spirit. The word abide is closely related to the word REside. That is, Jesus is talking about where you live. Not your address, but where your heart is, and your mind, your priorities, and that which has to do with your day-to-day.**

**When Jesus talks about our abiding with Him and with our Father who is in heaven he is talking about a relationship that suggests an intimacy and mutuality that is so strong and interrelated that life itself is associated with, if not dependent upon it.**

**Communion -- Holy Communion -- that space where we and God meet is, by definition, relational. Communion cannot exist outside of relationship. Communion and relationship are as intertwined as vines are to branches.**

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**I have heard some say that sometimes the golf course is an alternative to church – a place where one can commune with nature and with God. Well, I absolutely get that. I mean I do, in fact, sometimes see, and feel, and hear God in nature and in natural surroundings. But with that, it is not, I would argue, a substitute for attending church.**

**But who hasn't been struck by the awesomeness of God's master piece, this beautiful, green planet, busting with all kinds of life. Who has not felt a divine presence walking in a wood or standing on a mountain top where one can see for a hundred miles. Who hasn't been awed by a sunrise, maybe even a golf course on a clear, crisp spring morning? Though God is in nature, nature is not itself god. The caution is that we not confuse creation, even in all its splendor, with the Creator. Though creation absolutely reflects the imagination and amazing creative energy of God, it is not God. God is the prime-mover. Creation and the natural world are the work of his hands. To be sure, there is a relationship between God and creation, but they are not the same.**

**As we move deeper into the 21st century – indeed as we live through this current virus driven pandemic, there might be times when we find it difficult to "be at peace, be still and know that He is God, "as the Psalmist says.**

**I know that most participating in this service this morning by way of the internet - miss and are anxious to be able to once again gather together, gather in sacred space for worship. But "going to church" by way of the internet is not new. It did not spring up overnight as a consequence of Covid-19. According to the Barna group, an independent market research firm, even before the pandemic hit, some 50 million people were relying solely on the Internet for their spiritual needs. And they predict that it may not be long before up to 100 million people will be relying on the Internet as the source of at least some aspects of their religious experience.**

**One cannot help but ask: Can an electronic box be the contact point for my relationship with God? My branch that connects me to the vine making it possible for me to be in communion with the Holy. It's a legitimate question. But let me conclude this**

**morning reminding of a story told to us a couple of weeks ago – a story that speaks to this question.**

**In that posting, Sam Candler, Dean of St. Philips Cathedral, shared a story about chatting one day with a faithful member of the Altar Guild at his church. And he said that she told him why she so loved serving in this way; preparing the vestments and vessels for Sunday services. And she said something like: As I am preparing the vestments, the vessels, and the cruets of wine and as I am reminded that they really do contain the body and blood of Christ, then I am able to see Christ everywhere else.**

**And Sam concluded that if he could locate the divine presence in a particular place - maybe the place where he met his beloved bride to be. Maybe on a trail through the woods on a refreshingly cool spring day. Maybe even where a loved one died or is interred. If I can be with God in those special places then I am set free to experience God's presence anywhere else, as well.**

**We all look forward to the day that we can gather again as a worshipping community. But in the meantime, let us continue to meet in this way, via God-given, God-inspired technology. In fact, let us look forward to this time together because God is indeed everywhere present.**

**In these times, and in the meantime, in all times and in all circumstances may we lean into the words of poet-monk and theologian, Thomas Merton:**

**May we know God as the rain knows the earth.**

**The Leviathan the sea**

**The branches and the vine from which it draws its very life.**

**Amen.**