

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, May 26, 2014
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, Honolulu, HI

THE LESSONS

Acts 17:22-31

Psalm 66:8-20

1 Peter 3:13-22

John 14:15-21

THE SERMON: "Lonely?... God Is With Us..."

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

I'm sure all of you have heard about the lonely frog who telephoned the Psychic Hotline and asked what his future held. His Personal Psychic Advisor told him: "You are going to meet a beautiful young girl who will want to know everything about you." The frog was thrilled, "This is great! Will I meet her at a party?" he croaked. "No," said the psychic, "In biology class." So, thinking about loneliness reminded me about a story that the great preacher, Charles Swindoll, told in one of his sermons. He noted an ad that someone had posted in a Kansas newspaper several years ago that read, "I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for \$5.00." It almost sounds like a scam, doesn't it? But, it wasn't and the advertiser claimed that he got between 10 and 20 calls a day which only showed that loneliness was so strong that some people were willing to try anything for a half hour of companionship. People aren't meant to be alone. It isn't rocket science; you and I know that loneliness is an ongoing problem in our society. Let's be honest we Christians experience that loneliness even though Jesus told us last week, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me." The Bible tells us time and again that God is with us. Then why are so many people lonely? Even the Beatles commented on our loneliness in the song, "Eleanor Rigby: "...look at all the lonely people... Where do they all come from? All the lonely people, Where do they all belong?"

Acts 17:22-31

I think that Paul realized that the Athenians may have felt a lostness, an emptiness, which so many people experience when they feel alone. I think Paul was addressing that sense of emptiness in today's lesson from Acts. The Athenians weren't asking, "Why am I so lonely?" But, in a sense, they were asking, "What's life's meaning? What's my purpose?" - all those existential questions that they make us ask in college philosophy classes. In response to those questions, they invented an "unknown god" and erected an altar to that unnamed god and Paul picked up on that by saying, "... What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it... does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything..." And then, Paul says, "In (this God) 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." I think it's worth noting that Paul was addressing a very secular but, at the same time, a spiritually sensitive crowd in the Athenians. It makes me wonder if Christians today couldn't learn from Paul as we address today's postmodern culture - secular but spiritually sensitive. Paul didn't use the language of his letters to the Christian churches in Rome and

other places; he used the language of the culture; in fact, he even quoted a secular poet. Maybe Christians will learn to speak “postmodern” English because words like “salvation” and “redemption” and “being born again” make no sense in a postmodern context.

Psalm 66:8-20

I think what makes sense to anyone - Christian or non-Christian - is sincerity, honesty, and respect. In the Men’s Study, the author, Dr. David Platt, suggests that too often Christians make others think that something’s wrong with them when they ask, “Are you saved?” “Are you born again?” Instead, Dr. Platt hints that maybe we ought to learn to listen, then others might be willing to listen to us. We Christians do have a wonderful story to share. In a verse before our psalm, the psalmist says, “Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.” And then he praises God and tells about how God was with him despite all the trials he had to face: “For you (God)... have tested us; you have tried us as silver is tried. You brought us into the net; you laid burdens on our backs; you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water...” Despite all of that, the psalmist has seen that God was with him as he sings, “... yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.” Because of God’s faithfulness, the psalmist praises and brings offerings to God. It’s obvious that he is overwhelmed with thankfulness, “I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will pay you my vows... I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings... I will make an offering of bulls and goats.” And then the psalmist continues, “Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for me... I cried aloud to him... But truly God has listened; he has given heed to the words of my prayer. Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me.” I think we all have a story to tell. If we don’t, then why are we here? God has done something wonderful for us and to us and we, like the psalmist, are called to share how God has worked or is working in our lives. I think the men and women in our study groups are discovering that they can share those stories. That’s what will make sense to others. Personal stories. The Four Spiritual Laws, the Sinners’ Prayer may have worked before but God has brought us into a new, postmodern age so before people can sing “What a Friend I Have in Jesus,” they will need to know that you are a true friend.

John 14:15-21

Just last Sunday, as we sang verse three of “What a Friend We Have in Jesus, “ Are we weak and heavy laden, Cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our refuge— Take it to the Lord in prayer. Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer! In His arms He’ll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a solace there,” it made me think of James Taylor’s 1971 hit, “When you’re down and troubled And you need a helping hand And nothing, nothing is going right. Close your eyes and think of me And soon I will be there To brighten up even your darkest night You just call out my name And you know wherever I am. I’ll come running... Winter, spring, summer or fall, All you’ve got to do is call And I’ll be there... You’ve got a friend...” Now, to me, those lyrics sound very similar but, instead of a human, what if the friend that James Taylor was singing about were Jesus because “Winter, spring, summer or fall, All you’ve got to do is call” and Jesus will be there; Jesus is our friend. That’s precisely what he’s telling his disciples at the Last Supper. They don’t know that he’s about to be arrested and tortured and crucified as he says, “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.” Because we know the rest of the story, we know what he’s talking about. But, what if you were there with the disciples and didn’t know? This would really be confusing. So, when Jesus was buried in the Tomb, it’s no wonder they fled and abandoned him. But, Jesus

was good to his word, they did see him again but the problem is that the world doesn't see him. The question is "How will the world see him?" While I believe in the the Second Coming of Jesus, I think that Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Dr. Platt and others are right; until Jesus comes again, the Church - the Body of Christ - you and I - are called to be the manifestation of Jesus in the world. When the world sees the Church, it will see Jesus Christ. When the world sees you and me, people will see forgiveness, tolerance, mercy, grace, joy, peace, love. People will see a friend. But, you and I have the humility, I think, to know that we aren't perfect so we don't judge. But, despite our imperfection, the perfection of Christ will be evident as we honestly share that we have burdens and fears like everyone else but, beyond that, we have a hope that God will provide a better way through our faith in Christ. That's why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide us in our quest and witness.

1 Peter 3:13-22

Hopefully, you and I will not have to go through what the Christians that Peter was writing to were experiencing but, because we know what is happening in the Mideast, Egypt, and other parts of the world, we know Sisters and Brothers are being persecuted and, when one part of Christ's Body hurts, we all feel the pain. Because we feel that pain, we know that those persecuted Christians are wrestling with Peter's words, "Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God." Our prayer is that even the persecutor will come to God, even the persecutor will come to know that God gave his one and only Son so he/she will not perish.

The Call and the Challenge

It's very obvious that the world is searching for a way, for a truth that will make sense of the chaos, and a life of stability. You and I have found that but Dr. Platt claims that we (the Church) is not proclaiming that. He claims the Church needs disciples, not spectators. The world in Jesus' time was in chaos and Jesus found twelve imperfect people to tell the world about him. The world today is in chaos and the Holy Spirit is calling imperfect people like us to tell the world there is a Way and a Truth and a Life. If those twelve "losers" could do it, maybe, maybe... I'll let you and God finish this sermon....