

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Sermon for April 27, 2008
Raymond Raney

Acts 17:22-31
Psalm 66:7-18
1 Peter 3:13-22
John 14:15-21

Imagine the scene in Athens. Paul stands on the steps of the Areopagus and addresses the citizens gathered around: "Truly I can tell you Athenians are very religious. You have many monuments to your Gods. I noticed one that said: "to an Unknown God." To you what is unknown I proclaim to you as the God of Heaven and Earth, who created all things.

That's quite a statement to be making to a bunch of pagans. Takes a lot of brass to tell people that their worship, while very religious, has it all wrong.

A little background might be in order. You see, the practice in cultures like Greece that had more than one god was to have a monument to an unknown god in case there was one out there that they didn't know about. If you recall your Greek mythology, the gods suffered all the foibles of humans, jealousy, envy, lust, you name it. So you had to be really careful not to inadvertently offend any of the gods. So, not to have a monument to one was not done.

But Paul shouts out that it is obvious that the Greeks, though they have many gods, continue to search for meaning, and that was what the True God intended: "that we would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him" because in God we "live and move and have our being."

We are called to work for the Kingdom of God. What does that mean?

One job description comes in the Gospel of Matthew. I'm involved in planning a two-day conference over Labor Day Weekend called "Matthew 25"

This will be a conference that will showcase what congregations around the Diocese are doing to answer the question: "Lord, when did we see you ... suffering, hungry, thirsty, naked?" Holy Cross is one of the sponsoring parishes. Congregations will be asked to prepare displays and provide information for others that will give those attending access to a multitude of what is being done in outreach and mission. The conference also will provide workshops of a more general nature for all to attend that will deal with community work and funding sources.

But beyond the doing, we see in Paul's sermon, the clash of cultures.

What I find particularly interesting is that Paul stands at the Areopagus to proclaim that Jesus was raised from the dead. The Areopagus was the monument to Ares – the Greek god of war, and we hear Paul proclaiming the Prince of Peace. It would have been a little like Martin Luther King Jr. giving the “I have a dream speech” at the Pentagon instead of the Washington Mall.

We have that dream, as it says in the Psalm today, “God holds our souls in life.” Where we live and move and have our being.