

Easter 6

Sermon by Rev Maxine Cleghorn

Acts 17:22-31 1Peter 3:13-22 John 14:15-21

Christians should be willing at all times to defend our belief in God without compromise. The apostle Paul did just that wherever his ministry took him and whatever challenge he faced, some of which were very extreme.

Paul was in Athens and the opportunity was presented to him to teach the Athenians about God. Athens was a Greek territory and idol worship was like second nature to them. Paul noticed all the different altars, one for each Greek God. Paul also noticed that there was an additional altar with the inscription, "To An Unknown God". Athenians wanted to be on the safe side, so the extra altar was created just in case they missed dedicating an altar to a deity.

St Paul reminds us as he reminded his listeners in Athens that God made the world and he is not confined to shrines made by human hands. God also decides our fate and the fate of this world. St Paul also reminds us that God is not formed by the art and imagination of mortals. We are also forewarned in this chapter from Acts of the need to make adjustments and make amends with God because his judgement and the end time is impending.

Jesus should not be seen as a judge to be feared. The text from John 14 presents Jesus as the embodiment of love who expects reciprocity from us. 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." Why do we need an advocate? We need an advocate, a defender, a counselor who is perfect to represent us. Jesus is advocating right now on our behalf. He knows how to address our different situations. He knows exactly what we need and our ignorance in asking for things we do not really need.

Jesus refers to the advocate as the "Spirit of truth" whom he explains, will "abide in us and will be in us". I am personalizing Jesus' promise because his words speak to us in our time as they did to Jesus' disciples. The word 'abide' means "remain". The Comforter, sometimes referred to as the Counselor or the paraclete, remains with us and in us. Jesus made that possible. All this 'remaining' and 'abiding' is anchored on obedience. Jesus' promise of the Comforter, His life-giving Spirit, commands our obedience and love. For that reason, Jesus said, "Those who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me". The short and long term reward for our show of love and obedience is, God the son and God the Father loving us. Of course, we all know that God the Three- in-one initiates that love. The Trinity extends prevenient grace to us and loves us even before we started thinking of God. Now that is amazing!