

Things change. God doesn't.

Acts 17: 22-31

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God has indeed reordered our world. The way we were before seems so long ago and we find ourselves living in a new reality. We have discontinued practices that we thought were unchangeable. It turns out that ***the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands.***

I can remember a Sunday practice from my childhood. Many Sundays after church, my mom and dad would load us kids up in the family car and we would go for a Sunday ride. No destination in mind, Daddy would just drive. Invariably he would get lost somewhere on Long Island. In my younger years I would cry because I was afraid that we were lost. But my dad would say, "You are not lost. As long as you are with Mommy and me, you can't get lost." As I grew, I came to understand that and find comfort that no matter where I was, if I were with my parents, I could never get lost.

In these long weeks, when we've been cloistered in our houses even though we've been right at home, many of us have been feeling lost. We went into this time of Stay Safe, Stay Home fearing deep in our hearts that being physically separated from our faith communities would cause us to be separated from God. Fearing that if we were not in our familiar pews, that we would not be able to find God. We thought we needed our church buildings, our beautiful sanctuaries to feel God's warmth enveloping us in love. But It turns out that ***the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands.***

Friends, it's not only the separation from our buildings that has us feeling off kilter. We've all been living through a nightmare, an international nightmare. Some of us have lost loved ones. Some of us live in fear of losing loved ones. Some of us are suffering from the virus. Some of us are suffering from lost income because of the virus. Some of us are bored from too many days looking at the same walls. Some of us are forced to work at home. Some of us wished we could stay home and not work, endangering ourselves and our loved ones to keep essential businesses open for the rest of us. Some of us, the heroes among us, are working in hospitals, and nursing homes, working as EMTs and police officers and firemen and orderlies, many of whom are overwhelmed and over worked trying hard to keep people alive. Some of us don't know if we can continue to watch as more and more people get sick and die. This is indeed a long, national nightmare.

Those people whom Paul encountered in Athens, they had some inkling that there was a God whom they did not know. Paul had observed as he walked around their city that they had objects of worship in their shrines, and that among them was an altar to an "unknown god." He understood that these were people hungering for an experience of the holy. And so he told them about the one true God. He let them in on the secret that the one true God could not be confined

to their temples. No, he shared with them that the one true God was not far from each of them, not far from each one of us. He let them know that **"in God, we live and move and have our being."**

And Paul told them about Jesus – how he'd lived and how he'd died. But most importantly, he told them about how he had been resurrected. He shared with them the saving balm of the Good News that we are a resurrection people. He told them and he is telling us still, that death does not have the final word.

We are living in a time when we need to remember every day, that we are a resurrection people. These are indeed hard times that we are going through. These are times when it seems as if we have been abandoned by God. But Paul is right here, speaking to us from 2,000 years ago. The Apostle Paul is reminding us that no matter how bleak the time, God is still Emmanuel, God with Us. He is reminding us that we are God's people and that no amount of sheltering-in-place can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. No tiny microbe can take away from us the truth that we are a resurrection people.

You know, when I grew up and had children of my own, we would sometimes take those Sunday rides after church. And we would purposely turn down streets that we'd never been on. We would jump off of the interstate at an exit that we'd never taken before. This was before GPS and we would always lose our way. We grown-ups had to look to the sun for direction and keep turning until we found a familiar street or a business that let us know what town we were in. But in the back seat, our children just looked out the windows, not worried about a thing because they knew that they could never get lost while they were with their parents.

We are in a difficult time right now. We feel lost and afraid that nothing will ever be the same. Nothing will ever be like it was before. But we've also learned so many things in this time. The most important thing we've learned is that **the God who made the world and everything in it does not live in shrines made by human hands**. We've learned that no matter what, **in God, we live and move and have our being**.

Things may change, God doesn't.

We can never get lost. We have Jesus as our Guide and God as the foundation of our lives. We have the Holy Spirit filling us with such love that it just has to spill over onto others.

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Amen.

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