

Sermon on Wednesday 20 May

by Melanie Seward

(Readings: Acts 17. 15, 22-33; 18.1 and John 16. 12-15)

He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being.

Jesus is with his disciples to share the Passover meal. They have already been surprised and confused by their Rabbi and Lord getting up from the table to wash their smelly and tired feet. Then he starts to teach them things they either don't want to hear, or they find confusing, and to cap it all he says that there is stuff they cannot know yet! It sounds like Jesus is going away and leaving them, and then not really explaining exactly what is going to happen, even saying that God is keeping things from them.

Maybe some of this, or all of this, has, or does have, a familiar ring. I think that for us, too, there are times in our lives when we feel just the same as the disciples. I can remember a time in my life when I was knocked off my feet mentally and emotionally. Full of self-belief (and a fair bit of over confidence and a good dollop of pride), I found myself jobless when I least expected it (and felt it was when I least deserved it) - and then, in interview after interview, I just

wasn't wanted. Maybe that doesn't sound bad to you - I wouldn't blame you for thinking worse can happen. But the point was that, for me, at that time of my life, it knocked me off my perch and called into question all the things that I took for granted - being valued, earning a living, the purpose I saw myself as having - that being a vocation to teach. I just didn't understand. I bet that everyone is, at this moment, thinking of a time when we have been knocked off our perches - sometimes very swiftly and it hurts. Sometimes the worst does happen and there seem to be no answers - only confusion - God seems to go AWOL - it can sometimes seem that there is no possible explanation to help us understand, we don't know how the future will take shape - and we think, "Why is God keeping this from me?". Where the heck is God in all of this?

We have not lost our faith - we just find it hard to join up all the dots. In Acts 17, Paul goes to Athens and engages the locals with an argument as to why the one true God exists. He argues that this world, the nations, mankind, all must have been created, and created by a God who cannot be made by man. There are times when this kind of argument does not mean much, let alone touch our hearts. Rational arguments and church teachings do not help us cope with life. But Paul also says that God made human beings that he might be in relationship with them. He says that we are

created that we would “search for him - grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from each one of us”.

I love this image of groping and finding. Faith is not about having all the answers. Jesus has more to tell us. Some of it we are not ready for, not yet able to comprehend; there are other things that we might not want to hear - or feel strong enough to think through - just like those first disciples felt, even with Jesus still sitting at the same supper table. John's Gospel teaches us that everything about God is to be seen in Jesus and Jesus reassures us that for anything we do not still get, we will receive comfort and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

We may not be able to understand a full explanation until all is revealed at the end of times, when the whole of creation is renewed and we sit at what is described as the heavenly banquet; by then we will have a long list of unanswered questions but, then again, maybe we won't need to ask them.

For now – the answer lies with what is revealed about God in the life of Jesus and Jesus himself asks us to trust the Holy Spirit to guide us in making sense of our experience of living in the world. The relationship of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is mysterious and beyond us but, put simply - God

is all around. As Paul says, "In him we live and move and have our being". Thank heaven that this is not reliant on the strength of our belief. God's existence is not dependent on our awareness of him.

Instead, God is not far from each one of us – in other words he is right there, or should I say here, with you and me, and others elsewhere. When we are unable to comprehend or understand – or even perceive his presence – God **is** all around. All we can do, all we need to do, is sit and wait and trust. Pope Francis, preaching on March 23 as the pandemic was hitting Rome, said, "Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you." We must acknowledge that we do not know all the answers, that this is frustrating and even upsetting, but we can hold onto the promise of Jesus that he sends the Holy Spirit to enable us to draw closer to Him. God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit 'is not far from each one of us'.

"For in Him we live and move and have our being".

Reference

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-03/urbi-et-orbi-pope-coronavirus-prayer-blessing.html>