**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

*Modified Service of the Word*

May 17, 2020

***Preservice Music and Bell Peal***

**Opening Hymn: CW # 420 v. 1 & 3** *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*

**God moves in a mysterious way**

**His wonders to perform;**

**He plants his footsteps in the sea**

**And rides upon the storm.**

**Blind unbelief is sure to err**

**And scan his work in vain;**

**God is his own interpreter,**

**And he will make it plain.**

M: ♫ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ †, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

We have come into the presence of God, who created us to love and serve him as his dear children. But we have disobeyed him and deserve only his wrath and punishment. We, therefore, confess our sins to him and plead for his mercy.

**All: Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child. Have mercy on me according to your unfailing love. Cleanse me from my sin, and take away my guilt.**

The perfect life and innocent death of our Lord Jesus Christ has removed our guilt forever. We are, therefore, God’s children and will continue to live for him. Amen.

In the joy of this relationship with our God we pray…

Father of lights, every good and perfect gift comes from you. Inspire us to think those things that are true and long for those things that are good, that we may always make our petitions according to your gracious will. Hear us, as always, through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Congregation: Amen**

**First Lesson** : Acts 17:21-31 (EHV)

21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there enjoyed doing nothing more than telling or listening to something new.) 22 Then Paul stood up in front of the council of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. 23 For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar on which had been inscribed, ‘To an unknown god.’ Now what you worship as unknown—this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

24 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made with hands. 25 Neither is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all people life and breath and everything they have. 26 From one man, he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live. 27 He did this so they would seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘Indeed, we are also his offspring.’

29 “Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and planning. 30 Although God overlooked the times of ignorance, he is now commanding all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he appointed. He provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

**Second Lesson**: I Peter 3:15-22 (EHV)

15 But regard the Lord, the Christ, as holy in your hearts. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you. 16 But speak with gentleness and respect, while maintaining a clear conscience, so that those who attack your good way of life in Christ may be put to shame because they slandered you as evildoers.

17 Indeed, it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil, 18 because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in flesh but was made alive in spirit, 19 in which he also went and made an announcement to the spirits in prison. 20 These spirits disobeyed long ago, when God’s patience was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In this ark a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. 21 And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the body but the guarantee of a good conscience before God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 22 He went to heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

**Easter Proclamation**

M: Alleluia! The Lord is risen!

**C: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

**C: ♫ Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! These words are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Gospel Lesson**: John 14:15-21 (EHV)

15 “If you love me, hold on to my commands. 16 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. 17 He is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see him or know him. You know him because he stays with you and will be in you.

18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I am coming to you. 19 In a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 21 The one who has my commands and holds on to them is the one who loves me. And the one who loves me will be loved by my Father. I too will love him and show myself to him.”

**Hymn: CW # 416 v. 1,3,5** *How Firm a Foundation*

**How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord,**

**Is laid for your faith in his excellent word!**

**What more can he say than to you he has said**

**Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?**

**“Fear not, I am with you. Oh, be not dismayed,**

**For I am your God and will still give you aid;**

**I’ll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,**

**Upheld by my righteous omnipotent hand.”**

**“Throughout all their lifetime my people shall prove**

**My sov’reign, eternal, unchangeable love.**

**And then, when gray hair shall their temples adorn,**

**Like lambs they shall still on my shoulders be borne.”**

**Sermon:** Acts 17:21-31

**Worship the Lord Whom You Know!**

Fellow believers in Christ: “What’s new?” Boy, are we gonna get a lot of those when the church opens up again, huh?! Human beings are curious creatures, and we have a voracious appetite for the latest thing. To satisfy that appetite, we have the evening NEWS, NEWSpapers and NEWSmagazines, Blogs, Facebook and whatever’s “trending on Twitter”. But this kind of curiosity is anything but new.

In our text, Luke writes that, “All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there enjoyed doing nothing more than telling or listening to something new.” Whether it was nautical engineering, agriculture, or religion, they wanted to know “the latest thing.”

Curiosity isn’t all bad. But in our desire to learn new things, we may not always carefully separate facts from simple guesses. Just as we used to say about radio and TV, teachers are always warning students, “Just because it’s on the internet doesn’t mean it’s true.” That was part of the Athenians problem. They talked, but they weren’t always sure of what they were talking about.

But Paul, the messenger of God, used their natural curiosity as a springboard to tell them something totally new—something that was truly fact. “Paul stood up in front of the council of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar on which had been inscribed, ‘To an unknown god.’ Now what you worship as unknown—this is what I am going to proclaim to you’.” Then they wouldn’t have to guess at this God, but they would know Him.

They would, of course, deny total ignorance about God, and, in a way, they would be right. Those with their eyes open are going to get some things right. Psalm 19 speaks: “The heavens tell about the glory of God. The expanse of the sky proclaims the work of his hands…Their voice goes out into all the earth,” (vv 1,4). All over in this world people can see the powerful hand of the creating God.

So, St. Paul told the Athenians nothing new when he said: “From one man, he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live,” and also, “‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘Indeed, we are also his offspring’.” Those poets were praising the false god, Zeus, but the Athenians knew there is a creator-god, who made the world and each person individually.

A person can also learn something about God by listening to what’s inside. Our conscience teaches personal responsibility. God put it in us so every person may have some awareness of right and wrong. The Athenians knew that one couldn’t live any old which way, but that somehow some god established some standard of behavior. They didn’t have it all correct, but by examining this world and human conscience a person can come to a limited knowledge of God. (BTW, video lesson # 2 of Bible Background on our website.)

Watch how Paul takes normal understanding of God a step or two further.

Beginning with their present understanding, Paul says, “Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and planning.” To express their understanding of God, people have turned to their own wood- or metal-working skills to create a god they could see. Here’s where human intellect falls short of the truth about God. To put it a bit more bluntly, “Here’s where people get stupid!”

Isaiah speaks of a man chopping down a tree. It becomes “fuel for a man to burn. He takes part of it to warm himself. He lights a fire to bake bread, and then from the rest he makes a god and worships it. … Half of it he burns in a fire—Then from what is left he makes a god to serve as his idol…. He prays to it, ‘Save me, because you are my god’…. A person does not take this to heart, so he has no knowledge or understanding to say, “Half of it I burn in the fire…. Should I bow down to a piece of wood,” (44:15-19)?

Incidentally, this passage is one of the reasons I say that the Lord has a sense of humor. It’s not laugh-out-loud funny, but the irony can make a person chuckle. How foolish people are!

God shapes the person; the person does not shape God! So, the Lord firmly warns: “I am the Lord…. I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to idols,” (Isaiah 42:8). Paul had to re-establish the proper relationship between the Athenians and God. Making an idol is the highest insult to God.

Paul then spoke of the second highest insult. He reminded the Athenians, “Neither is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all people life and breath and everything they have.” Their mistaken belief was that somehow God needed our service. The idea might be expressed: “I bring 50% and God brings 50% and together we make a working team.” The thought is appealing; if God is not complete without me, then am I not really a bit of god myself?

Now honestly, don’t all these seem to be metaphysical concepts? Ideas way up there where the philosophers live? This is not what ordinary people think about.  “What’s new? How’s your job? Catch the game? What’s for supper?” We don’t get too deep, do we? The Athenians were philosophers; they loved talking about the latest things. But even so, metaphysical concepts find expression in our lives.

Who or what do we create as our god? We’ve moved well beyond wood, but who is the latest rock star or movie star? Don’t they function as a god? Whatever they do, we do. They have orange spiky hair, we have orange spiky hair. They wear narrow ties, we wear narrow ties. They curse a blue streak, we curse and swear like our idols. If they follow some off-beat religion, that religion gains adherents. Tom Cruise and John Travolta still get people to check out Scientology based on their personal fame. No longer do God’s standards of behavior apply, we do what our idols say.

I suppose some may say, “Well, sure, that’s typical of teenagers. We adults have passed that stage.” Have we? Or have we just replaced one idol for another. You see, society says that the truly successful have this kind of home, or that kind of car. We strive for those things. Our behavior is dictated by how much we have to do (legally or illegally, morally or immorally) to gain the marks of success. For some the idol is “the almighty dollar,” or “personal reputation,” or whatever it is that makes us do what we do. That’s a god!

Or if we do serve the true Lord, might something prompt us towards a self-righteous attitude like we are really doing something for God? “He is not served by human hands,” Paul exclaims. Are we somehow going to do God a favor? Or finish things that he hasn’t? It’s kind of like going to MacDonalds as a customer and trying to get behind the counter. First, they’ll look at you, but then they’ll have to say, “You don’t belong here.” They might get mad ‘cause we’re trying to take their job.

Well, God’s not too pleased when we try to take his place. Don’t we sometimes think we know how this world should be run? If we were God, we wouldn’t allow pandemics. Let him be in charge!

Give the Athenians some credit, as Paul did, for trying to put into practice their understanding. It was misguided, but they knew that God was worthy of worship. Yet lacking God’s word, they went the wrong direction. This is the reason Paul began, “I see that you are very religious….” Shrines and temples to Zeus, Apollo, Hera, and the rest. But to cover their bases they set up a generic altar to “an unknown god”. A noble attempt but an ignorant waste.

Speaking through Paul, God issued his command to repent. Repent of blind chasing after hundreds of deities. Repent of the arrogance of thinking we can either make God or make him complete by our skill or service. Repent of stepping in his shoes.

And though he’s given time for that repentance, but don’t waste it. “Although God overlooked the times of ignorance,” Paul warned, “he is now commanding all people everywhere to repent, because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he appointed. He provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

The apostle didn’t get much more chance to explain but did get in that quick word about Jesus’ resurrection. Still not far from Easter, we easily recall that Jesus’ resurrection is the guarantee of God’s forgiveness. All misunderstandings about the true nature of God, deliberate insults of him, ignorant idol-chasing, self-righteous pride, and every other sin has been punished at the cross. The Athenians were assured that God would indeed forgive their sins and ignorance.

But that’s where it ended. Paul had gone beyond their comfort level in mentioning resurrection. They dismissed him with an unfelt, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” He stayed in Athens for a while, but to our knowledge was never invited back. They went on looking for something new and different.

Yet some recognized the truth. “Some men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them were Dionysius (a member of the council of the Areopagus) and a woman named Damaris, as well as others with them,” (17:34).

It’s like that now. Many are comfortable discussing God in a generic sense. But talk about sin, or Jesus’ true nature, and their eyes glaze over and their ears close. But we cannot stop. We know too much to leave it at that. And people need to know about their God, for he has set a day of judgment.

Even if no one joins us, God commands us to repent of foolish idolatry and sinful ways. He wants us to put aside reliance on anything other than himself. You know that he alone sets the standards of behavior, not rock stars nor society. But you also know that for our failures he offers free and full forgiveness in his Son Jesus Christ. That’s the God you know. We will worship him! AMEN

**Confession of Faith--Apostles’ Creed**

**I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen**

**Prayer of the Church**

O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, we thank you for graciously giving us knowledge of who you are, and faith to believe in you as the one and only God of all. Wash us clean of our many sins in Jesus blood. May we rest our trust in him alone and cease the relentless striving to make ourselves worthy and let go of our need to be in control and let you be God. Grant us grace to learn our spiritual lessons from your precious Word. And work in us the desire to show your love through our actions.

We pray also for people everywhere who are in sin’s darkness and ignorance. Many have invented their own gods for themselves or have turned their backs entirely against your divine power and presence. As they struggle with their own guilt and inadequacy, by your grace and the Holy Spirit help them to reach out to you, for it is your desire to be found, and through faith bless all people.

When it is our witness that is needed to help them find you, may we be willing servants of your kingdom. Give us boldness to proclaim the whole message about you, no matter how it is received. But bless our witness that you will no longer be unknown to them but may be their God and Savior.

Capture our hearts again with your love that we may be faithful to you in every command and fruitful in every good work. Grant us also all other things we need and have forgotten to pray for, as you hear us when we pray...

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen**

**Hymn: CW # 447** *Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode*

**Who trusts in God, a strong abode In heav’n and earth possesses;**

**Who looks in love to Christ above No fear his heart oppresses.**

**In you alone, Dear Lord, we own Sweet hope and consolation,**

**Our shield from foes, our balm for woes, Our great and sure salvation.**

**Though Satan’s wrath beset our path And worldly scorn assail us,**

**While you are near, we will not fear; Your strength will never fail us.**

**Your rod and staff will keep us safe And guide our steps forever;**

**Nor shades of death nor hell beneath Our souls from you will sever.**

**In all the strife of mortal life Our feet will stand securely.**

**Temptation’s hour will lose its pow’r For you will guard us surely.**

**O God renew with heav’nly dew Our body, soul, and spirit**

**Until we stand at your right hand Through Jesus’ saving merit.**

**Closing Prayer and Blessing**

Almighty God, we thank you for teaching us the things you want us to believe and to do. Help us by your Holy Spirit to keep your Word in pure hearts that we may be strengthened in faith, guided in holiness, and comforted in life and in death, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with your and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

**C: ♫ Amen. Amen. Amen.**

**Closing Hymn: CW# 441 v.1,3,5,6** *O God, Our Help in Ages**Past*

**O God, our help in ages past,**

**Our hope for years to come,**

**Our shelter from the stormy blast,**

**And our eternal home.**

**Before the hills in order stood**

**Or earth received its frame,**

**From everlasting you are God,**

**To endless years the same.**

**Time, like an ever-rolling stream,**

**Soon bears us all away;**

**We fly, forgotten, as a dream**

**Dies at the op’ning day.**

**O God, our help in ages past,**

**Our hope for years to come,**

**Still be our guard while troubles last**

**And our eternal home!**

***Announcements***

***Brief Postlude***

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**Notes and News**

**Ascension Service** is this Thursday, May 21 at 6:30 pm. Tune in to Our Savior’s Facebook page for the live service streamed from church.

**Holy Communion** will be celebrated on Sunday, May 31 from 10:30 to noon. Assuming that we will not yet be gathering for worship in the building, the distribution will again be in the parking lot as outlined in April/May newsletter. The first occasion we served about 60 members of Our Savior’s. We look forward to serving you again.

**June Newsletter** is coming soon. Key articles: What have we learned from COVID-19; Procedures for when we resume services; Parsonage updates; Mission news, and more!  Watch for it in your mailboxes.

**Parsonage Update**  One major project remaining at the parsonage is replacing flooring. Samples have been selected and laid out in the parsonage. If you would like to see the choices and share your input, please call the church office or Bill Unruh

**Video Bible Class:** A Bible Class series on the “Bible Background” is being posted on Our Savior’s website (under the Bible Study tab at the top of the page) as well as on our Facebook page. The purpose of the class is to give a basic understanding of where the Bible came from, and how we should go about getting the most out of it today. The lessons are being built to allow for interruptions. There are multiple places in each lesson to stop and reflect on the thoughts presented to that point, and to complete some small tasks. Therefore, the lesson could be paused and left until a more convenient time to continue. The lessons will be posted by number.

**Children’s Message series:** Due to the difficulty in posting to YouTube, the “Young Worshipers” channel for Our Saviors has been taken down. Each week a new video will be posted on Facebook and Our Savior’s website (look for the “Children’s messages” tab on the home page). They will be identified by the date and the Sunday of the year to which they are connected. Look back each week for a new message for your children.

**Memorials:** We offer our thanks for gifts given in memory of Valeria Baumann from Mark & Beth Krohn and Rick & Karen Leopold. Blessed be her memory. Thanks be to God for the love which led to these gifts.

**Asleep in Jesus**  We offer our sympathy to Carol Smith, Laura Brandt and family, and John Smith as they mourn the passing of Carol’s brother, Gordon Borchardt. He was welcomed home to heaven on Tuesday morning. Blessed be his memory.