6th Sunday after Easter

Heavenly Father, in you we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may not forget you, but may remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A friend of mine would often say, “I love the Bible, it quotes the Book of Common Prayer so much.” Other than at least many of the Vietnamese people of this church, most Episcopalians are not known for their Bible knowledge. This is actually ironic, I think Episcopalians may know more than they think they do, because in the revised common lectionary which we follow, we have more Bible verses that we read in services than many other denominations.  And in all seriousness, much of the beauty of the words in our prayer book is because phrases from the Bible are artfully woven together, such as the collect which you just heard. You hear the same words which we read from Acts, “in you we live and move and have our being,” but the prayer which I read is a collect for Guidance from the service for Morning Prayer.

This proclamation that in God, we live and move and have our being, is a bold statement. Isn’t is funny that Paul is quoting Greek Gentiles, (not Christians or Jews) who had this phrase as a reference to one of their gods with a small “g?” But Paul hears these words and sees this attribution to the “unknown God,” as if the Athenians were hedging their bets. They made statues and idols to all the other gods, and just wanted to to be sure that they didn’t leave a god out of the panoply.

More to the point, however, Acts sets the stage, with this recognition that there is an  unknowing, an angst, in each of us, which can creep in no matter how many people or “gods” surround us,  and this angst and unknowing can make us feel very alone.  There are times I suspect when each of us can feel alone.  The Athenians attempt to address this with their statue to the unknown god and attempt to name it.  But Paul rather than upbraid them for their weird faith, instead uses this as a way to work through syncretism (merging or using another’s beliefs to work your own) and claims that this unknown god, this very unknown that you don’t have a name for … this is GOD, this is the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

We too have many idols, “gods” if you will, that we worship—-our technology, our toys, our bank accounts, our earnings, all things that don’t and can’t fill our angst and aloneness and these “gods” are all things that take time away from the one true God.  And it is the one true God, in whom there is the possibility of being accompanied. The God in whom we live and move and have our being.

The Gospel according to John, shares similar words of Jesus.  Jesus tells us about an indwelling, this being in the father and the father in him.  This incarnational love which we all have, is something to claim, to lean on, and to make part of self.  Jesus tells us that we are no more people going to be left than if the father were to leave him.  We are not to be orphaned.

The psalm for today makes a powerful claim, it is God who holds our souls in life… let’s ponder that for a minute.  It is a fairly simple but all encompassing statement.  People have very different and diverse ideas around the concept of Providence— that everything happens for a reason, specifically God’s reason or plan. It is probably from my past professional role as a medical examiner that I have a hard time interpreting when someone dies, which for us is unexpectedly, necessarily as God’s work or will.  Be careful of what you ascribe to God and not. Where I think you can’t go wrong is by telling how complete and accompanied you can be by your belief in God.  “I will tell out all that he has done for me.” Part of this is recognizing what that is, what is all that God has done for us. God gives us power, and truth.  But the definitions of power and truth in the Christian context are different than how the world defines them.  Christian power comes through the power of a king who was killed and that gains true power and truth by living in love in us. It is power that comes with the giving of love and forgiveness by God in Jesus and thus through us and for us…  for all, love that knows that there is enough.

It is this Jesus in us, this other *paraclete*, other accompanying one, who is the Spirit who dwells in us, to be our advocate and advocate for the world.  This is not a feel good individual thing, this is a community thing for us all, in all our dysfunction, that compels us to love as Christ, to keep practicing the practice of loving.  For it is more powerful than what the world says is power. The power of love is God in us for the world.

In the end, the Scriptures all testify to the same: we are not alone; we are not orphaned; we live and move, and breathe, ALWAYS, in the power and spirit of God who sustains us, and accompanies, and loves us through every move we make, in our lives, and in our dying. And in such company we are safe.