

Where Is God?

Acts 17:22-28

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

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I suspect many of us grew up playing hide and seek. Whether we played inside our homes, hiding in closets, under beds, and behind shower curtains...whether we played outside with flashlights and stars shining to guide us...or whether we played Sardines, the game of reverse hide and seek...in many different versions, it is a familiar childhood game.

And it is often fun. The anticipation as the seeker counts and then shouts, "Ready or not, here I come!" The thrill of holding your breath and being still, hoping not to be noticed, as the seeker walks by. The excitement, when seeking, of noticing the movement of a curtain and pulling it back to find a friend.

But just as the disappointment runs deep when someone hides so well the seeker cannot locate them, childhood games are not so fun when we feel like we are playing them with God.

And yet maybe, just maybe, God is not so far away. Maybe, like the glasses on your head you just can't locate, God has been right there all along.

For as long as humans have existed, we have been seeking. We have sought answers to questions. We have sought to understand what is happening and why. We have sought the presence of God, of something, someone bigger than ourselves.

When Paul arrived in Athens so many years ago, as he waited for Silas and Timothy to join him, he couldn't help but pay attention to the things and the people around him. After all, Paul was a traveler and he was a missionary. He was always paying attention to people, to their lives, to their beliefs, to their customs, to their curiosities. And he often found the opportunity to open up conversation because of what he noticed.

In Athens it was no different.

In typical Paul form, he drew people in with his observation. *"I see how extremely spiritual you are in every way,"* (Acts 17:22, NRSVUE) he said. And then he went on pointing out all the different worshiping places they had set up, inevitably to the great variety of gods. A place to worship the god who controlled the weather, a place to worship the god of fertility, a place to worship the god who they went to for healing, and so forth.

But it was one particular worshiping place that really intrigued Paul. As we read on, we hear him say, *"For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god'"* (Acts 17:23, NRSVUE).

The reality is that it wasn't only people 2,000 years ago who sometimes felt like God was unknown. Even today there are times, especially in the face of tragedy, when it feels to us like God is unknown...when we wonder even about God's very existence...when we feel like the answers to our questions, especially questions to or about God, will forever remain a mystery.

And yet Paul invites us, as he invited the Athenians, to both search for God and to know God.

We heard this both/and invitation when Mark was reading. There in verses 26 and 27 we hear, "*From one ancestor he made all peoples to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him—though indeed [God] is not far from each one of us*" (Acts 17:26-27, NRSVUE).

Paul invites us into this tension between the known and the unknown.

Paul reminds us that God is as close as our very breath...that there is nowhere we go where God is absent...that there is nothing we do without God's companionship.

And Paul also invites us to keep on looking for God. He invites us to keep on searching, groping, fumbling for divine discoveries.

And I love those words we hear in many translations - words like groping and fumbling. I love them because they remind us that this isn't always neat and orderly work. Our seeking of God doesn't always go in a straight line and isn't always an act of confidence. And yet, we are invited to keep on seeking even when it is messy, even when it seems like it might be a waste of time.

Because ours is a God of discovery...a God who wants to know us and who wants to be known by us.

Ours is a God who wants to see our faith, our understandings grow and change.

Ours is a God who desires to be part of our daily discourse, our daily interactions, part of the shaping of who we are.

Too often we have painted a picture of a God who sits on a heavenly throne at a great distance. Too often we have subscribed to the notion of a creating God who set the world in motion and then walked away. And yet, Paul reminds us that God is in everything, in every moment. *For 'In [God] we live and move and have our being'* (Acts 17:28, NRSVUE).

I want to invite you to simply sit for a moment. If you are comfortable, close your eyes. Breathe with me for just a few cycles. Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out.

In the very air we breathe...there is God.

In the beat of our hearts...there is God.

In the sounds of those around us...there is God.

In the touch of a loved one...there is God.

Does that experience...does my proclamation of this idea...mean that God suddenly ceases to be a mystery? I am certain that is not the case.

Rather God is the known and the unknown. God is the one we continue to grow to know and to understand, the one who - if we are looking - we will discover in so many more places than we first thought.

What if we believed that the journey was as important as the destination? What if we believed questions were as valuable as answers? What if we could embrace mystery even when we started out looking for certainty?

How would these choices impact our understanding of God?

So often we want a simple definition. We want a concrete form. We want easy answers. We want boundaries outside of which God does not step.

But what if we embrace a God who is with us and in us, who is as close as our very breath, who knows us and wants to be known by us? And, what if we also embrace a God of mystery, a God of discovery, a God of unending becoming?

“What if,” as Presbyterian Minister Melissa Bane Sevier writes, “we took Paul’s advice to look for the God who is not far away, but actually close by? What if our inward looking led us to see the places in our souls where God has already been at work, stirring in us the desire for meaning? What if our outward searching led us to see the places where God has already been at work in the world? What if our searching could lead us to recognize meaning, happiness, peace, belonging, and all those other things we need, that aren’t that far away at all?”

“In God we live and move and have our being. The object of our search is right here, with us and within us” ([American idols | Contemplative Viewfinder \(wordpress.com\)](#)).

Where is God? God is right here and God is everywhere. Just keep looking...keep watching...keep seeking. God is ready to be found. Amen.