

Sermon

Pastor Paul Hoffman

May 14, 2023 [Acts 17:22-28; John 14:1-14]

Grace to you, and peace, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It isn't anything necessarily astonishing or extravagant that Paul says to the Greeks that he meets that day at the Areopagus. He merely immerses himself in this place beloved to them. He reaches out to them as a true sibling and says to them, quite plainly and quite sincerely,

"I see you."

"Athenians, I see you."

"I see that the worship of gods is important to you. You even have a shrine with the inscription 'To an unknown god.'"

And then Paul says, "Do I have news for you! There is a God who sees you, more richly, and more fully, and more completely, than even I see you, standing here with you today. There is a God who loves you and cares about you."

Paul says, I see you, and God loves you.

Who among us does not want to be seen? Who among us does not want to, at some level, be deeply known? Be reassured that our lives count for something? That we are eternally cared for – that there is a God who wishes to be so close to us, and so intimate with us, that that God has become one of us, and come to live, and minister, and die, and rise again – for us, with us.

When we catch up with that Jesus today, we see him among the Beloved, and as a loving mother might gather her family around her, we see Jesus coming close with the disciples. We can almost imagine or hear him say to them, "Siblings! Huddle up; come in close. I see you. I love you. I care about you. And because I care about you, you can know that the one who sent me cares about you eternally as well."

And this is not just some Jesus sweet-talk. Because Jesus is about to seal this promise with his very own dying and rising.

"I see you. I know you. God cares about you eternally."

Whenever this text comes up as a preaching text, I'm a little disappointed that those who translated it for us made the choice to use the word "if" in the sentence: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

It could just as easily and faithfully been translated, "Since you love me, you will keep my commandments." I love the way that rolls off our theological tongues: "Since you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Now, you be the huddle; bring it in close. Come in, to where Jesus puts loving arms around you and says, "I see you. I get you at a very deep level. I know you, and since you love me, you will keep my commandments."

Areopagus isn't a word that just, like, tumbles off our tongues easily. I would venture to say that you only hear it every third year, when Acts 17 is read in worship; I just don't think you go around in your everyday life *Areopagus-ing* – but the *Areopagus* is basically "the world out there," the world beyond these walls, the *Areopagus* of Seattle, for example.

A marketplace filled with people and their woes and sorrows and successes and joys. Who long, just like we long, just like the Athenians longed, just like that little huddle of Jesus longed, to be seen and heard and known.

And that, my dear siblings in Christ, is our vocation as the baptized people of the risen Christ: to bring that seeing and knowing and loving to the world outside these doors. And Jesus says with every confidence to us today, "Since you love me, you will keep my commandments, you will do this!"

We were never intended to be *reservoirs* of God's love. We were never intended to just take all of that in and keep it safe for ourselves.

We were baptized to be *conduits* of God's love. To let that love flow, like so much baptismal water, into our lives and down the aisle of this church and out that door and down McGraw Street in both directions, into a world that longs to be seen and known and loved.

The gracious, eternal, resurrected love of Christ is a gift meant for us to receive, and it is a gift meant for us to give away.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.