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Acts 17:22-31: John 14:15-21

Today we are going to dive into one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith.

Our reading from Acts tells of St Paul's speech to the men of Athens. In ancient Athens philosophers used to meet to debate the latest ideas. St Paul was speaking to them at the Areopagus right in the centre of Athens, a flat area, next to the Acropolis. The Areopagus provided plenty of open space for meetings but also covered colonnades, (photo) temples and a synagogue. Terry and I had the privilege of spending time there a couple of years ago. It's a great gift to stand in places where actual biblical events occurred.

Although St Paul wasn't much to look at (photo) he was a gifted speaker. As he speaks he shares the image of the God he knows. The God who made the world and gives everyone life and breath and everything else. He even masterfully quotes back to them phrases that their own poets had written. "In him we live and move and have our being" and "we are his offspring". He doesn't mention Jesus by name here but speaks of the resurrection as proof of the man God had sent. I don't know who their poet was referring to by saying "In him we live and move and have our being" but we know that Paul was meaning that it's "in God, in Jesus, that we live and move and have our being"

The John 14 reading is part of the Last Supper discourse. Jesus himself speaking to his disciples preparing them for what is to come. Explaining that Father God will send the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to be with them forever and even be in them. V17 "for He lives with you and will be in you." Early texts say "He is in you"

There seems to be a contradiction between the words of St Paul and Jesus. St Paul tells us we live in Him, we live in Jesus. And Jesus tells us He lives in us. What is going on here? Is it we live in Jesus or Jesus by His spirit lives in us? Can it be both? What would it look like for this to be our lived experience? Paradox is at the very heart of the Christian faith. Don't we say Jesus was fully human at the same time as being fully divine.

Perhaps to illustrate: for many years Roz and I shared a caravan at New Wine each summer. They were amazing times, we laughed, prayed, shared community, drank wine, enjoyed feeling the closeness of God worshipping with 5000 other people. I learnt so much listening to thought provoking talks. I loved it. My faith grew. I have so much to thank New Wine for and my dear friend.

Speakers shared amazing testimonies from their lives and ministries. Sounding just the sort of things that Jesus would do. For example they would describe miraculous healings; meeting someone on public transport and within an hour they had given their life to Christ.

They were sharing, not boasting, but at times I was left disheartened.

Why didn't I see any of the events they were describing happening in my life.

Was I expecting too much? Were they super Christians? If I wasn't experiencing some of these mountaintop experiences did it mean I'm wasn't a good enough Christian, totally ineffective in prayer, or worst of all that God loved them more than me. Perhaps Jesus by His spirit didn't live in me after all.

Anyone know what I'm talking about?

At one level I know this is all lies but nevertheless sometimes we feel this way.

I struggled for years asking God for His mercy that I doubted the truth that I live in Jesus and Jesus lives in me. God in His kindness drew me towards Ignatian Spirituality. The concept of “finding God in all things” I found tremendously helpful. This is really what St Paul is talking about recognising that each breath, is a gift from God. I started to notice small ordinary things as God given gifts; the beauty of a butterfly dancing in the sunlight.

In my reading some very helpful things caught my attention. (Slide)
For example Colossians 1 in the Message version of the Bible.

So spacious is He (Jesus), so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe people and things, animals and atoms, get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of His death, His blood that poured down from the cross.

The more we get what we now call “ourselves” out of the way and let him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become. There is so much of him that millions and millions of “little Christs” all different, will still be too few to express him fully. He made them all.
(CS Lewis, Mere Christianity)

We assume Christ would be unmistakable, unmissable and extraordinary, but instead he comes to me humbly and quietly, clothed in the mundane, veiled in the ordinary, disguised merely as my own life. (Pete Greig)

I think the mistake I’ve made is hoping that a particular outcome would give me evidence of Jesus using me rather than just trusting that God is always at work for good even when we can’t see it in results that make sense to us.

Sometimes it’s hard to notice the Christ in us. You see the grace of God builds on nature and doesn’t override it. So the uniqueness that Jesus’ life reveals in us may be subtle but it will be there. In conclusion I truly believe that God, this vast loving mysterious presence who pervades all of creation, does use me, usually in undramatic ways. Even noticing being used by God in a small way is a miracle in itself. I’m content with this. Perhaps God is waiting until a time that if he does act more dramatically I’ll give Him all the praise and the glory and not think “how clever am I!!”

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