

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

From our first reading this morning in the book of Acts, the Apostle Paul tells the people of Athens “The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines built by humans nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things.”

Our living God gives the sacrifice for all of us even as he gives life and breath to all people everywhere, and in the second article of the Apostles’ Creed we confess our faith in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, who suffered, was crucified, who died and was buried descending to the dead and rose again on the third day. “For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’” we are God’s children, because we are his children, we should know that our God is not like gold or silver nor anything that the world holds sacred. Our living God became flesh and gave himself for us that we be saved by grace through faith, knowing and worshipping him instead of false gods.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit as Luther writes in his explanation of the third article in the Small Catechism, knowing and believing that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him, that we, you and I, are called by the gospel, enlightened with his gifts, sanctified and kept in the true faith, as is the whole Christian church kept with Jesus in the one true faith. One day we and all believers in Jesus Christ will be raised up and live eternally.

Now the Apostle Paul through the Holy Spirit calls the Athenians to faith in Jesus, telling them that “God has overlooked the times of human ignorance.” God commands all people to repent, to turn to him, he has fixed a day when Jesus will return and judge the world in righteousness. The call to God is through the Holy Spirit, not through Paul, or me, or you, the Holy Spirit calls one to saving faith, through us and our witness in word and living. And as I said last Sunday, there is no other way to God than through our Savior Jesus.

With Jesus in your heart, always be ready sisters and brothers, to make a defense of your faith to anyone who asks what your hope is and why you believe it, but do it with reverence, with gentleness, never hitting someone over the head with your faith.

Memorial Day will soon be upon us when we remember those who have died in the service of our nation and our freedom, including freedom to worship the god of our choosing. You know Christianity was once the prevailing religion of our nation, but those who have died in the service of our nation have themselves been Christian, some other religion, or of no religious persuasion at all, but they served for all of us.

And our Lord Jesus descended to the dead, believers and unbelievers alike, because as the Apostle Peter puts it in our second reading, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God.” It is

simply a matter of the truth and it matters to you and I in order that we be able to articulate what and why we believe what we believe. Not to nag others, to shame them, to beat them up with it, no! It matters that you and I are able to stand up and proclaim "Jesus is risen!" We must be able to stand and tell the story of Jesus, to know what it means to live our faith and to then actually live it.

It matters because unbelief, atheism, indifference, false witness, have become the prevailing pattern in our nation. Our kids and grandkids have vastly different experiences now than we did when we were growing up. It is now perhaps more important than ever that you and I live our faith, keeping Jesus' commands not to gain his love, we have that already, but because he loves us and died for us and we love him with the love we ourselves have received from God, and so we keep his commandments, loving God, our neighbor as ourselves, loving one another, our sisters and brothers in the faith as our Lord Jesus loves us.

You and I loving Jesus in our hearts, evident in our words and our actions, need have no fear of the future, you and I love and serve a risen Savior, God's love in the flesh, and we have much to proclaim to the world. Christ is risen!

AMEN