

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Sixth Sunday of Easter (A)

Acts 17.22-31

Psalm 66.7-18

1 Peter 3.13-22

John 14.15-21

From Easter through Pentecost the Old Testament lesson is replaced by a lesson from the Acts of the Apostles. The readings from Acts focus on the birth of the Church in Jerusalem (reporting, *e.g.*, the sermons of Peter and Stephen). The Gospel readings are generally from John.

**Acts 17.22-31**

1. This lesson is comprised of Paul's speech on the hill of Mars (the "Areopagus") in Athens, in which he seeks to persuade the pagan Greeks to acknowledge the one true God.
2. Paul proclaims the true God as hitherto "unknown" to the Greeks, and makes a threefold argument against pagan religiosity:
  - a. He deals with temples, sacrifices, and idols, arguing these to be projections of human longing.
  - b. Where the educated Greeks stumble over Paul's proclamation is precisely at the point that his argument becomes proclamation: the resurrection of Jesus.
3. Paul's sermon involves three elements: conversion from idolatry; resurrection faith; and judgment and rule of the world by the resurrected Christ.
  - a. It is precisely in these elements that we are each called away from the world to the worship of the true God!

**Psalm 66.7-18**

1. The verses selected from this psalm comprise a communal and then an individual offering of thanks to God.
  - a. Thanks are offered that God has brought us through all trials ("fire and water" in v. 11).
  - b. Thanks are offered in sacrifice (in this case in "burnt-offerings" offered in God's house, the Temple)(*cf.* Ps. 5.7).
  - c. The individual thanks offered are that God has heard the prayer offered by the psalmist.

**1 Peter 3.13-22**

1. Peter now addresses Christian confidence in the face of persecution. When he says "if you do suffer" (v. 14) this is not really a contingency, but his way of introducing a painful subject.
2. "[S]anctify Christ as Lord" (v. 15). Some now argue that the early Christians revered Jesus as a teacher, but not as God. This verse is one of *many* giving the lie to that argument, for the title Peter applies is that of "Lord" as used at Isaiah 8.13, where "Lord" = God, the LORD.
3. Jesus' victory over sin and death is applied to all Christians by baptism.

- a. Peter argues how the salvation of Noah prefigured our salvation in baptism.
4. V. 19, referencing Jesus preaching to “the spirits in prison” has been argued to refer to His activity on Holy Saturday.
    - a. In the Apostles Creed we confess that after His death, Jesus “descended into hell” or “descended to the dead”.
      - i. The Church has taught that Jesus preached to the souls of those who perished in the Flood, or to those supernatural beings (fallen angels) who had rebelled against God.
      - ii. In preaching, Jesus declared God’s victory.
  5. By baptism, all Christians share in the victory of Jesus over hostile spirits.

### **John 14.15-21**

1. Having announced that the time has come for His glorification, and having given the disciples a new commandment, Jesus, in His final discourse now makes a set of promises to the believer.
  - a. In the prior verses (last week), Jesus promised that the believer will do “greater works”.
  - b. He promised to answer prayer made in His name.
  - c. Now He promises the coming of the Holy Spirit.
2. Jesus speaks of the ways in which he remains present in the community of believers.
  - a. The Holy Spirit will be present, invoked by the love of believers.
  - b. Believers will be in opposition to the world, *i.e.*, they will live in Christ.
3. To live in Christ means to keep His commandments. This includes both the commandments regarding behavior (*i.e.*, the Ten Commandments), and the “new commandment” given by Jesus, that believers are to love on another.
  - a. The presence of God is evident to believers but not to unbelievers.
4. The word John uses for the Spirit is here rendered as “Advocate”. This is “Paraclete” or *parakletos*, which is equated both with the spirit of the departed Christ and with the Spirit as a person.
  - a. John does not use the term Spirit. This is used in the Synoptic Gospels. John’s description of the function of the Paraclete does, however, parallel that given for the Spirit in Matthew, Mark and Luke.
  - b. *Parakletos* includes the meanings of Advocate and Counsellor.