



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

A Devotion During This Time of the Coronavirus Pandemic Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 17, 2020

by Garland F. Pierce

I'm Here

Acts 17:22-31

17:22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.

17:23 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.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

17:24 The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands,

17:25 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.

17:26 From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live,

17:27 so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him--though indeed he is not far from each one of us.

17:28 For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'

17:29 Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.

17:30 While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent,

17:31 because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

The young family was so happy. They were finally in their dream home. Imani, the youngest, was perhaps the most excited of anyone because now she had her own room. She could decorate it as she wished; and, she had space and privacy. Then, night came. It was time for bed. She said her prayers; and, her mother turned out the lights and closed the door. The night brought with it thick, suffocating darkness and strange creaks and sounds. Imani cried out; and, her mother came and turned on the light. The next night and the one that followed were all the same. Night came, darkness and fear set in, and Imani cried out. However, without turning on the light, Imani's mother would lovingly and tenderly reassure Imani, "Sweetie, I'm here." For several more nights as Imani tried to get use to her new home and new room, when she called out in the darkness, her mother's voice came with love and assurance, "Imani, you do not have to be afraid of the dark. I'm here."

Some African traditional religions speak of an all-powerful, transcendent god that is far away. This was true for many of the ancient Greeks, even those Greek scholars, philosophers, and inquisitive minds that invited Paul up on Mar's Hill, the Areopagus, so they could hear more about the god of which Paul spoke. And speak he did! He acknowledged their earnest search for truth and their devotion to their many transcendent gods. Then he told them about the God he served. They must have marveled to hear about this God who sits high and looks low. It had to be amazing for them to hear of a God who is both transcendent and yet so close until it is almost too hard to perceive and distinguish. Paul preached, "From one ancestor he made all nations 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 grope for him and find him--though indeed he is not far from each one of us."

Night has come for all nations inhabiting the whole earth. An invisible killer still runs rampant. Many are groping—for answers, for peace, for food, for livelihood, for stability, for the hand of their sick or dying loved one, for their future, even for toilet paper, cleaning products, and household supplies. Some grope for God. This pandemic has caused some to ask, "Where is God?"

God is not far from each one of us. God calls back even in the dark lovingly and with assurance, "You do not have to be afraid of the dark. I'm here." To the families grieving the loss of loved ones without the physical encircling of the community, God says, "I'm here." To the family of Ahmad Arbury and the families of others who grieve loss caused by race-based violence and death and to those who are sick and tired of being sick and tired, God says, "I'm here." For those on the front lines and those who are trying not to grow weary in doing good as they work for peace and justice, God says, "I'm here." This is good news even in uncertain times. Where God is, night cannot last. John 14:18 records the same assurance from the risen Christ, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." We got this! We are not in this alone. We have each other. God is right here with us, Emmanuel!

TALK: Take a moment to be silent, reflect and/or share—When have you searched for God? How did the realization that God was near surprise you?

Read or recite the Apostle's Creed, our Affirmation of Faith

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered

under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

PRAY: Lord God, You made the world and everything in it. You are the Lord of heaven and earth, and you do not live in shrines made by hands. You give all humanity life and breath and everything. Thank you for not being far from each of us. In you we live and move and have our being. COVID-19's suffocation cannot stand against you for you give the breath of life. You are as near to us as our breath. We thank you for this blessed assurance; and, pray in the name of Emmanuel, AMEN.

ACT:

1. There are those who are or feel alone at this time; "reach out" to them to assure them that you and others are there for them and so is God. It may be just the encouragement they may need.
2. See also the Word Search that accompanies this devotion.
3. Revisit the Psalm 23 Challenge first issued as part of the March 22, 2020 set of resources.

Song:

Breathe On Me, Breath of God
AMEC Hymnal, #192

1. Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life a-new,
That I may love what Thou dost love
And do what Thou wouldst do.
2. Breath on me, Breath of God,
Un-til my heart is pure,
Un-til with Thee I will one will,
To do and to en-dure.
3. Breath on me, Breath of God,
Till I am whol-ly Thine,
Till all this earth-ly part of me
Glows with Thy fire di-vine.
4. Breath on me, Breath of God,
So shall I nev-er die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine e-ter-ni-ty.

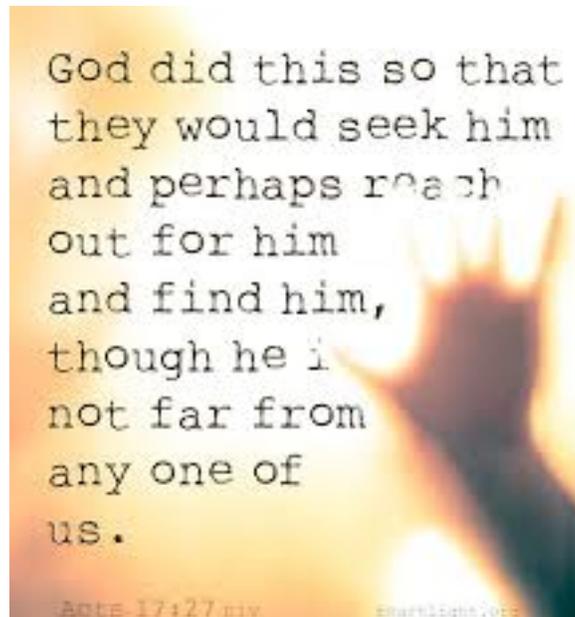
Alternative Song:

My God is So High, <https://youtu.be/OLNNHA2-CiQ>

African American Spiritual performed by The Moses Hogan Singers

Physical space—You may wish to create a dedicated space for your time of devotion. You may choose to place a candle, bible, and special symbols or material/fabric to help you focus and center during this time of reflection and prayer.

If you use this meditation and exercise in a time of family or group devotion, share in the leadership; allow different persons to read or lead different parts of this meditation.



The Christian Education Department, AMEC Publishing House, and others will continue to develop resources that can be used as times of personal and collective devotion and study during this pandemic to help us all sustain and strengthen our faith and resolve.