

Sixth Sunday of Easter
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Acts 17:22-31

The setting of this speech is the Areopagus (“hill of Ares [Mars]”), northwest of the Acropolis in Athens). The word can also refer to the council that took its name from its original meeting place on the Areopagus (Acts 17:19). The speech shows the marks of Greco-Roman rhetoric, including in 17:28 allusions to ancient writers: Epimenides (6th century, “in him we live and move ...”) and Aratus (3d century, “for we too are his offspring”). There have been discoveries in Athens of altars dedicated to unknown gods (17:23), and the author may have picked up a piece of local color to illustrate his point. The reference in 17:22 to the “extreme” religiosity of the Athenians may actually have been a compliment in their ears.

Psalm 66:7-18

Psalm 66 is a composite psalm. Verses 1-11, comprise a *hymn*, and verses 13-20 derive from an *individual thanksgiving*. Although hymns normally praise God for God’s cosmic power or power over nature, a minority of hymns, including this one, celebrate God’s saving deeds in Israel’s history. In verses 14-18 the psalmist recalls a previous lament, a sure marker of a thanksgiving psalm, and tells of God’s salvation from distress. The offerings mentioned in verses 12-13 are part of the psalmist's promise to sacrifice to God if God does indeed save him.

1 Peter 3:13-22

This passage takes part in an extended ethical instruction (*paranesis*; 2:11-4:11) and is centered on Psalm 34:12-16. Some commentators take the question in 3:13 (“Who will harm you ...?”) as putting the epistle’s date of composition before 95 CE, when the first empire-wide persecution of Christians under the Emperor Domitian occurred. Recent research, however, has questioned the extent, severity, and even actuality of this persecution and reopens the debate about the date of 1 Peter and the usefulness of 3:13 in dating it.

John 14:15-21

This chapter begins the so-called “farewell discourse” of the Fourth Gospel, a long speech Jesus gives his students (disciples) at their last meal together before the crucifixion (John 14-17). Farewell discourses are common in Greco-Roman literature as well as in biblical and apocalyptic texts and have as their literary aim the description of the situation of the students after the death of the master. The intended irony of the discourse in John is that Jesus’ death is the beginning point of a more intense relationship between Jesus and his followers than was possible during the years of his ministry. A significant figure in this new relationship will be the promised “Advocate” (Greek: *parakletos*, “representative,” or “lawyer”), the “Spirit of Truth.” In the Dead Sea Scrolls the Spirit of Truth is the cosmic foe of the Spirit of Deceit, so the promise is that Jesus, after his departure, will send the disciples a powerful defender.

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