

6 Easter – Year A – May 29, 2011
Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:8-20; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:14-21
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Have you Googled God lately? I'm serious! I got one billion, forty million hits for the word 'God'. Now I thought that was a lot of people with something to say about God, and then I Googled 'money'. So it's one billion, forty million hits for 'God,' and over two point two billion hits for money. So just for fun I thought I'd Google 'food'. After all, we might expect that to be an important consideration. Well, you're absolutely right, but not quite as important as I thought. Here's the score. One billion forty million hits for 'God,' and only five hundred and nine million hits for 'food'. So, we still have a leading contender in money. What do you think I Googled next? Being a daughter of Eve and a mature woman of the twenty-first century, of course I Googled 'sex'. How many of us thought there were more hits for 'sex' than for 'God'. Raise your hands, don't be shy! Right again! There were about one billion eight hundred and sixty million hits for 'sex'. Based purely on the number of Google hits, the hierarchy of search interest currently goes something like this: money, sex, God, and food.

With or without the help of the internet we have some serious questions today. They're the kind of questions that are not hard to answer. However, the implications of our answers have disturbed and challenged humanity since the beginning of time. Let's go slowly. Remember, it's probably not the questions that are hard for us to answer. It's living with the implications of a "yes" or "no" that invites serious thought and prayer about our lives and relationships, about how we spend our money and our time, and about God. Here are the questions. As Christians, if we find out all we can *about* money, does it make us better stewards of God's gifts? Does knowing *about* money make us more generous in giving and sharing what we have with others? Does knowledge *about* sex, or any number of sexually degrading pictures that might pop up on our computer screens help us to honor the dignity and equality of every human being? If we read all we can find *about* food on the internet or in books, does that feed in us the desire to end hunger in the world, or in our own community? Does knowledge *about* food fill the deep hunger we have for God? And if we merely read *about* God will we ever really know who God is?

Today we heard Paul's speech to the Athenians. From a purely literary or oratory perspective, we might join with critics or scholars and say, clever speech, great rhetoric, but not terribly effective. In fact, later in this chapter of Acts, we find out that only a few people responded to the Good News that Paul shared with a great crowd that day. By all accounts, the Athenians have a deep interest in gods, religious expression, and worship. It seems that if they'd had Google, God might have made it into the number one search spot! As Paul notes, he was astonished by the number of religious sites, altars, and objects of worship that he found while wandering around the streets of that city. He used one of those altars with the inscription "To an unknown god" to talk to the people *about* the "God who made the world and everything that is in it." A bold and impressive start, from which he went on to tell the Athenians *about* the God who gives and sustains all life, the God "in whom we live and move and have our being." Paul proclaims the common ancestry of all people and nations as children of God. He calls the Athenians to repentance. Then Paul tells them why God is not found in images or stuff made with human hands. In fact, Paul says, that God sent "a man", and when he was betrayed to death, God raised Him from the dead, assuring us once and for all of God's righteousness in judging the world. The man, of course, is Jesus, the Son of God, and the Word made flesh, whom Paul had personally encountered in a vision on the road to Damascus. So do you think Paul helped the Athenians to *know* God?

There have been many profound speeches throughout history. Some of the most memorable are Susan B. Anthony's speech "on women's right to vote"; the "I have a dream" speech of Martin Luther King; or Ronald Reagan's "tear down this wall" speech on his second visit to Berlin. The words of these proclamations almost certainly come with a flood of vivid memories and emotions. Words do carry an immense and powerful potential for good or evil as they take root in our hearts and minds. Maybe some of

the great speeches we've heard or read bring us closer to living into the answers to our questions. Sometimes, we're just stupefied by the fact that it took so long. After thousands of years of oppressive inequality, it wasn't until 1873 that Susan B. Anthony asked in her speech, "are women persons?" The freedom from discrimination that Martin Luther King dreamed of for African Americans may have become law in 1964, but has the law changed the way everyone acts? Is discrimination really outlawed just because we have legally protected rights and recourse? Isn't there a deeper truth here? Isn't it possible that there's a more profound liberty in not just knowing *about*, but living into the perfect freedom of God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Hasn't God spoken the Word telling us that **this** is the freedom that will change the world?

There's a sermon every Sunday morning, and a homily every Wednesday evening, here at Our Saviour, and in millions of religious gatherings across the world. Like the Athenians, is it enough for us to hear someone engage and open the words of Scripture, preach, teach, or talk *about* God for us to know who God is? Even if we can honestly say that the answer to the question is mostly 'no', God still desires that we gather together to worship Him, to listen, to experience God in prayer, to encounter the living God in ancient rhythm of our liturgy, in singing, and most profoundly through participating in Holy Communion as a community, as a part of the Body of Christ. Being here today, and every time we worship together, may well be the most important thing you and I do this week to move us towards a deeper knowledge, and a closer relationship *in* and *with* God. How we bless one another in what we do together in this place, and what other Christians gather to do throughout the world is a vital part of actually *knowing* God.

Now you may not have given this much thought since children's Sunday school, or confirmation class, yet beyond our personal desire to worship God, is the synergistic blessing of the gathering of the Body of Christ. Coming together as God's children and participating in worshipping God as community transforms us into Christ-likeness. By God's grace, every element of our liturgy works together and plays a part in helping us to know God, and be a part of God, in deeper and ever broadening ways. As you and I are transformed by the power of the indwelling Spirit, we are truly empowered to participate more and more fully in the nature and character of God. We see that change through the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. We become what we pray. We're transformed by the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion. Through the liturgy of Word and sacrament; in our hymns and songs of praise; in our prayers and the gifts that we offer to God, including ourselves; in humble confession of our faith, and of our sins; in all of this there is nothing incidental or trivial. The movement and flow of our worship as we experience it together has incredibly long roots, and an amazing testimony to share with the world. These are words and sacraments blessed by God, soaked in Scripture, bathed in tradition and used by God in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform us into Christ-likeness, deepen our relationship with Christ as we live into the promise of our baptism, and to guide us in resurrection living now. As Christians, we are more intimately connected to the divine web of reality, truth, and abundant life than to anyone or anything else in this whole world, because we participate in God as the Body of Christ. That is freedom.

The truth behind today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles and my little foray into Google is that there are a lot of people in the world who know *about* God, but are not yet free. As for Google, I just couldn't rest with 'money' at the top of the cyber list, so I did one final Google search. Ultimately, the word that produced the largest number of Google hits in this mini-survey was 'love'. I guess people are still looking for love in all the wrong places. God knows – you and I know – that love, true freedom, and abundant life can't be found through Google.

Amen.