

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter Rogation Sunday 2020

*<sup>24</sup> 'The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. <sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring." (Acts 17: 24-28)*

We would normally try to mark this Sunday with outdoor observances, taking our worship outside, weather permitting, of course. Over the years, we've worshipped in gardens, on farmyards, in the school grounds and in our local garden centre. So it would, I think, be fair to say that we, as a rural community, are aware that we don't really need a building to bring us into the presence of God. Yet there's been a general sense of regret that our church building has had to be closed due to the corona virus crisis.

We're almost like the people of Athens in the time of the apostle Paul. They liked their buildings too. They felt the need to mark their places of worship with monuments of brick and stone, and they had a whole raft of gods. For each one there were shrines at which the people placed offerings, sometimes to ask favours and at other times to avoid the wrath of the gods – Greek gods had a reputation for being easily upset.

So when Paul had an opportunity to speak to the Greek community in Athens he presented them with a god quite unlike the gods they worshipped. Among the many shrines in the city, Paul had found an altar inscribed 'To the Unknown God'. The Athenians were probably just playing safe just in case there was a god that they'd missed out in their raft of deities but Paul knew the god who had no name. This was his God, a very different God from the capricious gods of the Greeks. Paul knew God as the only God, the one who made and nurtured all creation and all humanity in all the different times of their being. Not needing a building to contain him, Paul's God could be alongside everyone at all time.

The God of Paul is our God too. We may feel that we're searching and groping for God at the moment. The whole of the globe is in crisis and the spaces which we've set aside for God are closed to us. Yet, as Paul said, 'he is not far from each one of us'. This is something we recognise on Rogation Sunday when we traditionally ask God to blessing the crops and the community in which we live. As we do so we're confirming that our continued survival is dependent on God. Our situation this year has made us more aware of our frailties than ever and as a consequence of our need for God's help.

We can't meet together on this Rogation Sunday as we usually do but we can still ask for God's blessing. We know that he is close to us so we can turn to him in our homes and gardens. This year we might ask not only for our land and its produce to thrive, but also that there may be growth in scientific knowledge with which to combat the virus. We can pray too that we and the communities we are part of know that, as God's offspring, we are at all times and in all places surrounded by his love. Amen