

God our redeemer,  
you have delivered us from the powers of darkness  
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:  
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,  
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us up  
to eternal joy.

Our text this morning may be found in today's passage from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 17 and verse 29:

**'We are God's offspring.'**

In this last month since Easter, I've been excited by the texts that have caught my attention and formed the heart of our Sunday sermon:

- **'I love the Lord'** Psalm 116 v1
- **'... being aware of God ...'** 1 Peter 2 v19
- **'Do not let your hearts be troubled'** John 14 v1:

And, this week, we have the wonderful claim that Paul makes to his Greek audience at the Areopagus in Athens, the claim that we are all children of God, **'God's offspring'**.

Here in St Bartholomew's, there's a long tradition of making everyone welcome. Back in March 1995, when Neo and I were doing my first holiday chaplaincy here,

one of the first people to ring the doorbell of the church flat was Elizabeth Hannay. Elizabeth, a major in the American army during the Second World War, whose family home was just to the left of the Grand Hotel on the opposite side of Passage Solidor, was one of the reasons St Bart's never closed, why our doors stayed open to welcome all manner of folk. She had an ecumenical heart and all were welcome here whatever one's denomination: Catholics, Protestants, even Orthodox Christians. Whether you are a Methodist, Open Brethren, Eglise Reformé or Catholic, you know you are welcome to come up and share communion alongside your brothers and sisters in Christ who happen to be Anglican, all of us, God's offspring, worshipping Him in a nineteenth century Church of England church on the north Brittany Coast of the English Channel !

And that's what I find exciting about today's passage from Acts. Paul has been heard speaking in Athens about his understanding of God and he is invited to address a gathering of philosophers at the Areopagus, Epicureans and Stoics, all of whom are seeking the meaning of life, trying to understand the reality of life against a background and culture of a pantheon of gods, a rich story of the lives of men and women and deities who made themselves known by what they said and by what they did.

What we have here in Acts chapter 17 is Luke's short summary of Paul's speech, the essence of his address – I doubt that Paul's sermons were as short as mine but here in Luke's account it is even shorter ! And Paul is making a simple point – that in having an altar to an unknown God, the folk of Athens are worshipping the God that has made himself known to Paul. Greek and Hebrew, Gentle and Jew, are

all God's offspring. Paul captures his vision of universal brotherhood succinctly and in verse 28 we hear him say? 'In him, we live and move and have our being'. We are all rooted in God, God-connected, God-dependent. And Paul caps his argument by quoting a Greek poet I've never heard of before called Aratus, 'For we too are his offspring.'

It's an exciting message that we are all part of God's family and it is one I trust that is at the heart of our church here in Dinard. But I guess you know what I'm going to say: all may be welcome but not all welcome the opportunity to belong. Folk always have a choice and, sad-to-say, I've been here long enough now to know there are those who choose to stay outside our fellowship - who may be like Groucho Marks who famously said that he wouldn't want to join any club that would have him as a member.

The important thing is that Paul presented the gospel in a way his audience at the Areopagus could understand, a way that spoke to them where they were and if the Epicureans and the Stoics of first century Athens chose not to get their heads round the possibility of resurrection, then I guess that's what it means to be human, to be God's offspring - we all do have a choice.

So what we you going to choose ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 35 :Universal

