

Acts 17:22-33 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship-- and this is what I am going to proclaim to you. "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. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 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. 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. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-- an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council.

We're now in week 4 after Easter. Last Sunday was called "Jubilate" (Rejoice). This reflects the first line of the introit: "**Jubilate Deo omnis terra**" ("Shout with joy to God, all the earth") from Psalm 66 (65). That fits right into this joyful Eastertide: *Rejoice, rejoice...*¹ for our Lord lives and we shall live also. The watchword for this 4th Sunday in Easter is from 2 Corinthians 5:17: "**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!**" That cements and elaborates the joyful Easter theme. From this jubilant background we look at today's reading from Acts and hear of God's new creation. IX is the firstborn. He and his victorious resurrection are the very reason that we've got a living hope, that we're not caught up in the old, past and finished, but rather have a glorious future in Christ and his holy Christian Church and therefore all reason to rejoice, be jubilant and joyful: **Jubilate, jubilate deo omnis terra...**

The living God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - created heaven and earth. He's the maker of all people too – the potter, the carpenter, the artisan, husbandman² and true father. We folks all descend from the first human being that husband and wife in paradise called Adam & Eve. Doesn't matter whether we live in Africa, Australia or the Americas. As we read: *God himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 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.*³ If all was easy and clear and transparent we all from the various different races, nations, tribes and families could trace our origin to this one forebear and first ancestor straight from paradise. This godly descentance gives reason to rejoice: Jubilate! It's good reason to be grateful and full of confidence for we are "His offspring!" Think about that!

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsMsHv5fDoY>

² That word "husbandman" is used in the KJV for this weeks gospel in Jo15:1. Lovely!

³ "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my limbs, my reason, and all my senses, and still preserves them; in addition thereto, clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He provides me richly and daily with all that I need to support this body and life, protects me from all danger, and guards me and preserves me from all evil; and all this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me..." (<http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php# creed>)

Sadly our pedigree and genealogy is not so easily discernible for us. It get's lost in the hazy past. Due to our sinfulness and faithlessness, doubt and skepticism we miss it. Since our fall into sin, we have lost the rightful memories. We got lost on the way and can't find our way back without help from God and his HS. That's why some even speculate, they (or others) originate from monkeys, other's climbed out of the reeds in the marshes, others out of an ant heap and I'm sure you've heard even more bizarre myths and legends. Yet, instructed by God's holy Word we trust that we've got but one forebear Adam, who was created by God. He is our earthly father, the ancestor of all, the first in line of human beings with red blood pumping in our veins, godly breath in our lungs and a soul that seeks and needs the triune God to find true fulfilment, full life and real peace.

God created them in the beginning – he created them man and wife: Adam and Eve. This godly origin of our parents and our common family heritage & genealogy makes us brothers and sisters of the same flesh and blood. And despite all the particularities and specialties of races and tribes the similarities and commonalities between them are sheer endless and overwhelming if compared with other species like gorillas and orangutans, which are supposed most alike to us. They however remain beasts, while we are human after all. No reason to have a superiority complex on grounds of our race or background, nor an inferiority complex either. The Jews thought they were more religious than others, the others but damned goyim. The Greeks prided themselves of their wisdom and looked down on all others as barbarians. Some so-called "abelungu" (isiZulu) or "legkowa" despise so-called "non-whites" and sometimes the opposite is also true. Still truth be told, what do we have, that we have not received? Nothing. God is the creator and giver of all good things. He made heaven and earth plus he created me perfectly in his sight just out of fatherly goodness, godly goodwill and tender mercies of a loving, caring and preserving father – even if it might look less in your eyes and worthless in others. Therefore look at yourself from God's perspective like Ps 139 teaches us⁴ and sing praises to the Lord: *Jubilate deo omnis terra et soli deo Gloria!* He knew, what he was doing – even if we sometimes don't get it.

God created us in this wonderful and marvelous way of his so that we people would seek him and reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. *'For in him we live and move and have our being.'* As some of your own poets have said, *'We are his offspring.'* That's our God-given inner compass, our orientation created in us, his election, calling and given purpose – to seek God, reach out for him, find him and live, move and have all our being in, with and through him – giving thanks to God,

⁴ "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." (Psa 139:13-14 NIV)

praising, serving and obeying him⁵ and living in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives⁶ – following our callings, doing our work and going about our business and livelihood: *Jubilate!* As Johann Heermann⁷ teaches us:

*Give me the strength to do With ready heart and willing
Whatever you command, My calling here fulfilling.
Help me do what I should With all my might, and bless
The outcome for my good, For you must give success⁸*

Because there is but one creator God and we are all his creatures, we should love, fear and trust him alone and make no idol, effigy or image of creatures to worship, praise or pray to – neither up in the sky, nor down on earth or even below the earth either.⁹ It's God's good, holy and just will, that this be recognized, followed and obeyed by everyone. Idolatry is not just a slight infraction or a minor misdemeanor, but rather the great temptation and worst felony and trespass in God's book. If we trust and hope more in others or other things than in him, don't love and fear him above all else, then we reject him, rebel against his holy ways and lose our calling, goal and purpose in life. Sadly after the fall we're no longer positively inclined towards God, but rather draw away from him and seek other, wrongful goals and gods. John Calvin writes "*the human mind is... a perpetual forge of idols.*"¹⁰ Man in this sinful state remains surprisingly creative. It's those pieces of wood the prophets Isaiah & Jeremiah ridicule: "*Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.*" (Jer 10:5 NIV)¹¹ Not even covered with precious metals or stones do they gain wisdom or power etc. We might laugh at these ancient ways of sinful man, but secular man is not much better today. He trusts in technological innovation, financial prowess or just in himself as invincible master of the universe – be that in the hero cult of the healthy body, some naked Barbie doll, crafty superman or just the old, but every tempting idol "Herrenmensch" or egocentric obsession.

⁵ "...for all which I owe it to Him to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true" (ebd)

⁶ "...and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise; who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

(<http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php#baptism>)

⁷ Johann Heermann 1585-1647: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Heermann

⁸ <http://www.lutheran-hymnal.com/lyrics/lw371.htm>

⁹ The First Commandment: Thou shalt have no other gods. What does this mean?—Answer: We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.

(<http://bookofconcord.org/smallcatechism.php#tencommandments>) and as we used to learn it still: "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them..." (Ex.20:4-5)

¹⁰ John Calvin in chapter 11 of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: "There was a kind of renewal of the world at the deluge, but before many years elapse, men are forging gods at will. There is reason to believe, that in the holy Patriarch's lifetime his grandchildren were given to idolatry: so that he must with his own eyes, not without the deepest grief, have seen the earth polluted with idols—that earth whose iniquities God had lately purged with so fearful a Judgment. For Joshua testifies (Josh. 24:2), that Torah and Nachor, even before the birth of Abraham, were the worshipers of false gods. The progeny of Shem having so speedily revolted, what are we to think of the posterity of Ham, who had been cursed long before in their father? Thus, indeed, it is. The human mind, stuffed as it is with presumptuous rashness, dares to imagine a god suited to its own capacity; as it labours under dullness, nay, is sunk in the grossest ignorance, it substitutes vanity and an empty phantom in the place of God. To these evils another is added. The god whom man has thus conceived inwardly he attempts to embody outwardly. The mind, in this way, conceives the idol, and the hand gives it birth. That idolatry has its origin in the idea which men have, that God is not present with them unless his presence is carnally exhibited, appears from the example of the Israelites: "Up," said they, "make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wet not what is become of him," (Exod. 22:1)." Cf.

<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.iii.xii.html>

¹¹ So das Elijah too as we read in 1Ki18: "At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." (1Ki 18:27 NIV)

Now the apostle St. Paul continues: "*In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.*" Idolatry is ignorance, it is misleading, it puts all those that trust in these false gods, effigies and idols to shame and finally condemns. Therefore repentance is called for. Conversion. Giving up the old, bad and godless ways. Turning around. Leaving the old behind. It's past. No longer limping on 2 sides, but rather following God's holy, righteous and just ways only, completely and with a pure heart. Living God pleasing and faithful lives as Christians: "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*" Be baptized and let all your sins be washed away. The blood of IX cleanses us from all iniquity & sin. This is the 2nd creation and another wonderful reason to rejoice: ***Jubilate!*** There God has given rebirth – a new birth through water and Holy Spirit – a new life, a new creation, a new beginning in righteousness and holiness. You, who have been baptized, live daily in the grace of this gracious gift from God holy baptism. If you fall into sin, crawl back into baptism. Confess your sins to each other, have them forgiven again, let IX take them away for good and grant you a clean conscience by his grace & favour! For there is a final judgement coming and he the living God will judge the living and the dead impartially and with eternal consequence. Therefore don't fool around with sin, but get rid of it – in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. +

See, IX is alive. He conquered sin, death and the devil. He rose victorious from the grave. Sin, death and devil and the portals of hell couldn't hold him. He's Lord of all. All authority in heaven and on earth are his now. The evil powers, spirits and authorities are disempowered by Christ our Lord. Now he lives and reigns at the right hand of the heavenly Father and he lives and rules mightily for us and our salvation. Nobody can push him aside, overthrow his kingdom or cast a shadow on his glory. He's very much alive and you shall live also. Heaven and earth will go up in fire, but God is planning a new heaven and earth. That's another wonderful creation of his. It's still outstanding, but in IX it has already begun and you are part of it through baptism. Therefore put all your trust in him and his means of grace for he cleans, rids and liberates you of all your sins with his almighty proclamation and gracious absolution in word & sacrament. Therefore you are no longer subject, enslaved and bound by the evil chains of the devil, his ilk – the spirits in the skies, on the earth and below the earth. No, you are free – through the washing of the Holy Spirit and the baptismal waters. Free to live the new life as holy Saints and forgiven sinners in the holy Christian congregation and Church. You are free to serve your Lord in blessedness and righteousness all the days of your life: ***Jubilate – now and always!*** Amen. The Peace of our Lord IX be with you always + ***Jubilate +***

Hymn 596: *All Christians who have been baptized...*