

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

Today's readings invite us to stand in a space that is at once familiar and strange: the place where God is present, but not always obvious.

In Acts, Paul stands in Athens, surrounded by altars. It is a city alive with belief, crowded with devotion, full of people trying, in all sorts of ways, to name what is ultimate. And instead of dismissing them, Paul begins with recognition.

"I see how extremely religious you are in every way."

It is a generous beginning. A respectful one. He does not start by correcting them, but by noticing them. By taking seriously their longing, their searching.

And then he points to one altar among many: "*To an unknown god.*"

Which may be the most honest altar in the whole city.

Because if we are telling the truth, we all have one.

Even now. Even here.

There are parts of God we do not understand. There are moments when prayer feels like speaking into silence. There are questions that do not resolve, situations that do not make sense, seasons where clarity is not given.

And the instinct, often, is to feel that this is a failure. That faith should be clearer than this. That we should know more, be more certain, feel more secure.

But Paul does something remarkable. He does not shame that not-knowing.

He says: "*What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.*"

Not a different God.

Not a replacement.

But the God who has been there all along—unrecognised, perhaps, but not absent.

And then he says something that shifts the ground beneath our feet:

“In him we live and move and have our being.”

Not: we search for God from a distance.

Not: we occasionally encounter God when conditions are right.

But: we are already in God.

Which raises an uncomfortable and beautiful possibility—that we may spend much of our lives looking for a God who is not lost.

And then we hear Jesus.

“I will not leave you orphaned.”

It is an odd word, unless you recognise how often we feel that way. Not literally, perhaps, but existentially—cut off, uncertain, responsible for navigating a world that does not come with clear instructions.

And Jesus does not respond by offering a plan.

He offers a presence.

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

An Advocate. A companion. A presence that does not come and go with our awareness of it.

And this is where many of us hesitate.

Because if we are honest, we would often prefer clarity to presence.

We would like a map. A timeline. A set of answers that remove ambiguity.

But what Jesus offers is something both more intimate and more demanding.

Not control.

Relationship.

Not certainty.

Presence.

“You know him,” Jesus says, “because he abides with you, and he will be in you.”

Which suggests that the life of faith is less about figuring God out and more about learning to recognise God with us—already, quietly, persistently.

And then we come to Peter.

“Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you.”

At first, it sounds like a call to have everything sorted. To be articulate, convincing, prepared.

But then he adds:

“Do it with gentleness and reverence.”

Gentleness.

Reverence.

Not argument as domination. Not certainty as a weapon.

But something more like testimony.

Something more like: *This is why I still have hope... even when I don't have all the answers.*

And that matters, because we are not living in an easy time to be hopeful.

Globally, we see conflict, instability, deep divisions. Closer to home, in Australia, many carry quiet burdens—financial pressure, uncertainty about the future, the slow erosion of confidence in systems we once trusted. And personally, each of us knows something of that: griefs we carry, decisions we face, questions we cannot resolve.

So when Peter says, “Give an account of your hope,” the real question is not how polished our explanation is.

The real question is: *Where does that hope come from?*

Because if it comes from everything going well, it will not last.

But if it comes from something deeper—something not dependent on circumstances—then it may yet hold.

And then Peter says something we cannot avoid:

“It is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God’s will, than to suffer for doing evil.”

It is a difficult line. It always has been.

And we must be careful not to misunderstand it.

This is not a statement that suffering is good. It is not a justification for injustice. It is not a call to accept harm as though it were holy.

Rather, it is an acknowledgement that living truthfully, loving generously, following Christ—may, at times, put us at odds with the world as it is.

And when that happens, the question becomes:

Will we continue?

Will we hold onto the way of Christ, even when it costs us something?

Not because suffering is admirable.

But because love is.

Because truth is.

Because the life Christ calls us into is deeper than whatever opposes it.

And this is where the readings begin to converge.

Paul, standing among people who do not yet know Christ, trusting that God is already present there.

Jesus, promising a presence that will not abandon us, even when he is no longer visible in the same way.

Peter, calling for a life marked by hope, gentleness, and endurance.

And all of it held within this great Easter reality:

Christ is risen.

Which means that the unknown is not empty.

Which means that presence is more reliable than clarity.

Which means that suffering, while real, is not ultimate.

Which means that hope is not naïve.

So perhaps the invitation today is not to resolve everything.

Not to eliminate the “unknown God” from our lives.

But to pay attention.

To notice where we are searching.

To recognise where we feel uncertain.

To be honest about where we feel alone.

And then, gently, to consider:

What if God is already there?

What if the Advocate is already present?

What if the life of faith is not about moving from doubt to certainty,
but from unawareness to recognition?

And what if hope is not something we manufacture, but something
we receive—something that grows quietly as we begin to trust that
we are not alone?

Christ is risen.

And because he is risen, the unknown is not absence.

It is invitation.

Because he is risen, we are not orphaned.

We are accompanied.

Because he is risen, hope does not depend on how clearly we see.

It depends on the One who holds us, even when we cannot see him at all.

And that may not answer every question.

But it may be enough—
to keep us attentive,
to keep us gentle,
to keep us hopeful,
and to keep us moving—
in him,
through him,
and toward the life that is already unfolding in God