

Acts 17:16-31

It's a good thing that we have earthquake insurance. Apparently there are some cracks in our steeple caused by the earthquake which hit our area a few weeks ago. Most of us have life insurance. We have our homes and cars insured. We rely heavily on health insurance. In case something goes wrong, insurance of all types and varieties is a good thing to have. But have you ever heard of "divine insurance?" No, not "assurance," but divine "insurance." The Greeks had it in the days of the Apostle Paul. Let me explain.

When Paul was walking through the city of Athens he noticed that there were many idols to all the Greek gods and goddesses...Zeus, Athena, Ares, Aphrodite, Apollo...all the gods and goddesses of the Greeks had idols and altars in the city. But he also noticed an altar which had the following inscription: "To the unknown god." This altar was their earthquake insurance, or their volcano insurance, or their tidal wave insurance, or we could say, their divine insurance. If there was a god out there somewhere that they were unaware of, this altar was for him. They had idols and altars to all sorts of gods and goddesses, but in case they missed one, so that he wouldn't become angry for being overlooked and strike them with an earthquake, or a volcano eruption, or some other disaster—the people built this altar just for him. I suppose we could call that "divine insurance"—insurance against being destroyed by a god...a divine being.

Looking at it like that, couldn't we say that this insurance is still around today? In fact, it's probably more common than we realize. When Bart Simpson, from the Simpson's cartoon series, was in desperate trouble, he quickly said a prayer including the names Mohammed, Buddha, and Jesus. Just to make sure that his prayer was heard, he mentioned all the "divine beings" he could think of. That was divine insurance and it's a symptom of our times. When Oprah Winfrey planned a prayer service at Yankee Stadium following the attacks of 9/11, she invited Muslims, Jews, Hindus, and Christians. "If we all call to our "gods," was her thinking, "surely at least one of them will be listening." Have you ever seen idols hanging from the rear-view mirrors of cars? "Even if God is too busy to help," the drivers believe, "this saint may be able to protect me as I travel."

Divine insurance...practiced by the ancient Greeks and by many people today...and dare I say, even by Christians in church? We insure ourselves against God and His anger by keeping ourselves in line with His commandments. Have you ever heard someone say, "Yea, I'd better come to church again sometime soon; it's been quite a while since I've been there." That's divine insurance. "I don't want God getting too upset with me for not coming, so I'd better show up again."

Each one of us is tempted to purchase this divine insurance. We think that God is pleased, or displeased with us based upon what we do, or don't do. If we feel guilty about a sin we have done, we may put a little more money in the offering plate, or we may volunteer to help out around the church, or we may, out of guilt, get up once for church on Sunday morning. We're insuring ourselves against God. The Greeks put up an altar to keep "him" happy. We try to keep Him happy with us by not disobeying too much—and when we do, by making up for it as best as we can.

My dear fellow sinners redeemed by Christ, there is no need for such divine insurance. When St. Paul saw that altar to the unknown god, he told them who that "God" was—Jesus

Christ; and that this Jesus had died and risen again. That, and that alone, is all the “insurance” they needed. The true God, their Creator and Judge, was not going to strike them with a disaster because He was angry with them. Rather, He was calling them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ because He loved them.

And so for you. You cannot purchase insurance against God by what you do, but Jesus already did for you. His blood on the cross was shed for you. That blood was sealed on you in your baptism and is given to you in His Holy Supper. Christ’s blood keeps God’s anger away from you so that all you see is His love and mercy.

The Greeks in Athens did not need to insure themselves against an angry “god” out there by putting up an idol to him. God was already merciful toward them. He had sent His Son to die and rise again for them, and He sent His apostle, Paul, to preach Christ to them.

If you are here this morning out of a feeling of guilt because it’s been a while since you’ve worshipped—have no fear; God is not angry with you. The same bounteous gifts of mercy which He gives to all His children in Christ, He gives to you right here today. There is no need for any of you to put your money in the offering plate because you feel guilt over something you have done as if you can insure yourself against God’s anger by doing so. You can freely offer your gift to God because, for Christ’s sake, He forgives you, and this you believe. And don’t feel compelled to serve on a church committee, or help out around the church in order to please God. He is already pleased with you...He loves you not because of what you do or give to Him, but because Jesus died and rose again for you. Help and serve all you want, not out of compulsion, but from a cheerful heart—a heart that simply wants to respond to the kindness which God has shown to you in Christ.

So, did those Greeks get rid of their divine insurance? Did they take down that altar to the unknown god? No. Some listened to Paul and believed the good news of Jesus Christ, but most continued just like before. They kept their gods and their idols, and their divine insurance against the unknown god. God had shown mercy to them in the message of Jesus Christ, but most all of them had no use for Jesus. They rejected their Savior and held on to their old way of life.

Let’s not fall into that grave error here. There is no need for any of us to walk out that door today thinking we still need divine insurance. Be assured, Jesus lives for you. There is nothing but compassion in God’s heart toward you. He raised His Son so that you would believe this. Your Savior lives! This means your sins are buried in His old tomb. God holds nothing against you. All is forgiven. Each one of you is forgiven. Do not feel burdened to live a certain way before God. Feel free to live as His children in Christ. He is not searching for the dirt in your life—He always forgives you in Christ.

And so come to His House often, not out of a sense of duty or from guilt, but because here is Jesus for you with His gifts of life and salvation in His Word and Sacraments. Serve Him and offer your gifts to Him, not because you have to, not to keep Him pleased with you, but because you want to as His forgiven saints in Christ.

It may be a good thing to have earthquake insurance, and fire insurance, and auto insurance, and medical insurance...but against God, you need no insurance, because you have Jesus—or better said, He has you. He has you and holds you firmly in His pierced hands.

He has you in His Word and Sacraments where His blood always covers you. Be assured, there is no better place to be. Amen.