

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, May 4th 2016

“Rather it is he who gives to everyone life and breath and everything.” Acts 17:25

I am fond of seeing my work as a physician as important and holy, necessary and integral. Take for example, times that patients go into cardiac arrest in the hospital setting. I have been trained to calmly and efficiently lead the medical team in the decisions that give our patient the best chance at survival. In the few situations where we succeed and the patient has a great outcome, I proudly tell my family that I “helped save” a patient’s life today. And yet, God does not need me.

It’s God that gives life to everything. That anyone thinks he or she has the power to give or take away life is an absurd insult to the might of God. We see this ever-present in our culture of death. Somehow we have bastardized our view of life so much that we have coronated ourselves as powerful enough to determine whom is worthy of life in the death penalty. We have become so arrogant and far from the understanding that life comes from and goes to God that we have granted mothers the “right” to abort the lives of their own pre-born babies. We have even deemed ourselves worthy of determining when our own lives should end in physician-assisted suicide laws. During an election season in the U.S. we hear all the misguided slogans (“Her body, her choice”, etc.) that claim to understand life. Listen for them and you will hear it all around you.

After recognizing our haughtiness regarding the power to give and end life, it’s almost as though the writer of Acts injects, “Oh you silly people...rather it is he who gives to everyone life and breath and everything.” As a physician, this is hard to grasp. I love the scientific method and new, elegant discoveries in medicine. Hence, it’s difficult for me to admit our limitations. And yet, we are ever so limited. There are times in the hospital when I firmly grasp my incapacity to help, my inability to ease the pain or suffering of my patients or their families.

God is not served by human hands because he needs it. We are created out of his abundant love and made for that very purpose, to know God, love God, and serve God. As a Type A physician, I struggle with the idea that I cannot contribute. God does not need me.

Rather, God gives me the beautiful and humbling responsibility to care for his children now and again. So yes, his work through me is vital, but to presume that I am integral to that equation is conceited and unfounded. I should see my work as a blessing. How often do I find myself complaining about that blessing?

God also offers me something much deeper than needing me. Desire. God wants me. I don’t experience that very often in my career. It’s not often patients want to see me. Residency is brutal, depressing, and thankless. And yet God is so very different. I get to glimpse some of that difference in my fiancé. Sure, Sarah needs me in some ways, but more importantly she wants me.

Together let’s ponder the ways that we inadvertently pretend that we, rather than God, are the determinants of “life and breath and everything”. Join me in striving to recognize that even though he does not need us, the work that God gives us to do is actually him blessing us with the opportunity to serve him.

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