

"so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'"

Happy Mother's Day. This passage is one of my favorites, and this being a day to honor moms, I think it only appropriate that we edit Paul to say "In **her** we live and move and have our being... 'For we too are **her** offspring.'" Actually, that's not such a bad edit — because Paul's language in verse 28 is already the language of the WOMB. Before any of us ever groped for anything, we were already held. Before we could seek, we were already found — carried, sustained, known by name before we had words. That is what a mother gives. And Paul says THAT is what God is: the one in whom we live and move and have our being. Not distant. Not waiting to be discovered. Already the ground beneath us.

This passage is one of the most philosophically dense moments in the New Testament. Luke and Acts, written by the same author, probably in the late first century. Irenaeus, who lived in the second century, first attributed the books to the Luke mentioned by Paul in Philemon, Colossians, and 2nd Timothy.

Verse 26 establishes a kind of universal human history — one blood, one origin, bounded by times and geography that God has set. Then verse 27 delivers the purpose clause: all of that arrangement exists so that humanity might "seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward her and find her."

The Greek word translated as "grobe" in our reading this morning is particularly striking. It also means "feeling your way." It's the word for a blind man feeling along a wall, or someone moving through darkness with hands outstretched. It's not ignorance exactly — it's directed but limited searching. The seeking is real, the object is real, but the perception is impaired. What makes verses 26–27 so rich is the double paradox Paul sets up: God has arranged the entire human story to make finding her possible, and yet humanity still only gropes, still only perhaps finds her. The word "perhaps" (εἰ ἄρα γε) is remarkably tentative for a theological claim. Paul doesn't say God arranged history so

people would find her — but so they might. This preserves genuine human freedom and genuine human tragedy within a providential framework.

The irony Paul is constructing is almost poetic: humanity gropes in the dark for a God who is closer than their own breathing. The groping isn't because God is distant or hidden behind layers of mystery — it's because, as Paul immediately says, he is not far from any one of us. The tragedy of natural religion, in Paul's framing, isn't that God is inaccessible. It's that the one being sought is the very ground of the seeker's existence. You cannot get closer to something than "the one in whom you live and move." This gives the fumbling a particular character — it's not like searching for a lost object in another room. It's more like someone desperately searching for their glasses while wearing them. And as I get older, that analogy hits very close to home. Hah!

But rather than dismissing Greek religious searching as mere error, Paul is treating it as genuine but frustrated cognition — real contact with something real, but without the clarity to name it properly. The "unknown god" altar isn't just an opening rhetorical gambit; it's Paul saying your own worship acknowledges a gap between your seeking and your finding.

The movement of the passage is then from groping → proximity → naming — and resurrection which becomes the definitive act of naming, the moment the unknown becomes unmistakably known. It's a remarkably generous and sophisticated theology of religious experience for a first-century Jewish missionary.

So what can we take away from this passage that brings it down from its lofty philosophical density to our practical everyday experience of being one with the One who is?

While on a jog the other day, as I was running along the bike path, I saw a couple walking in the opposite direction, both of them were using white canes in one hand and linking arms together. I was mesmerized by that visual, the blind leading the blind, and in that moment I hoped I would be able to catch up with them on my return. Sure enough, as I was jogging back this couple was sitting on a bench together and I stopped

to say hi and ask if they were both visually impaired. Yes, they said, they were both blind. With some tears in my eyes, I told them how they had taught me a powerful lesson:

We are all blind in one way or another, and the only way we can find our way back home is by helping each other out — always somehow guided by an unseen presence that is always with us in our trials and tribulations and never leaves us alone, even when we feel like we have been forgotten.

And here is what I keep coming back to. That weeping jogger who turned around on the path — who saw that couple from a distance, who went back, who stopped at the bench and told two blind strangers what they had taught him without knowing it — that jogger wasn't just me, that jogger was God showing up in a sacred moment of caring, fraternity, and solidarity.

And, if I am honest, it is also the best image for what a mother does. Mothers are the ones who see from a distance and turn back. Who find us before we know we are lost. Who sit down on the bench beside us without being asked. Long before any of us could grope for anything, before we could seek or fumble or reach — we were already held. Already found. Already home. That is what Paul is pointing to when he says the one in whom we live and move and have our being is not far from any one of us. Not far. Already here. Already turned toward us. So on this Mother's Day, to every mother in this room — you have been, for someone, that presence. You have been the linked arm in the dark, the ground beneath the first uncertain steps, the bench in the middle of the long path home. Thank you. And to all of us, mothers or not — the groping is real. The community is necessary. But the finding is — in the end — always being found. Amen.