As we listen to Paul today speaking to a group of gentiles and people who believe in many gods, I am imagining what that must have been like for him. How would one prepare such a sermon for such a diverse group of people? I mean here we are in a world where people who proclaim belief in the same God and Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can often not even speak or hear one another. I wonder if there were people shouting things back to Paul or throwing things at him as he spoke, as he challenged them to really think about who God is. I can say for sure that there were no men standing around with assault rifles. Pauls’ description changes the listeners image of god/gods from an object that one can know nothing about “an unknown god” to a God who is at the very core and permeates Creation itself and everything and everyone in it. The ultimate Creator and being of our existence. The one in which we live and move and have our being. Paul goes on to say the we are this Creator’s offspring. That is such a powerful image. I don’t know about you but even though I loved my earthly parents, and love my friends, children and partner dearly it is not possible for one person to fulfill us completely, they are not the final answer:but that’s ok because you and I are children of God. What does it mean to have such a being as our God? It’s rather incredible to think that God holds up and permeates all of creation, every creature in it, that means every person in it also. That’s why Paul wants these Gentiles and pagans to know the essence of the one true God. It’s not an entity in which we pray for sunshine or wealth or health or whatever…God already is totally invested in every aspect of our being, and every other being on the planet and beyond. What does it mean to be held up and interconnected with such a God and Creator? I don’t have the canswer to this question; but I can to say that sometimes I feel a connection when I pray with others that let’s me know that we are wrapped in the arms of our Creator God. That something beyond us is binding us together and connects us beyond ourselves and beyond any material thing on this earth. I know it more clearly when I see that other people have felt it too, that they are crying tears of relationship, connection and joy even in the midst of suffering. These moments often lead to a caring and compassion for the world beyond themselves. Because our readings today focus on the all encompassing aspect of God I want to tell you about a Buddhist in my book of Holy Troublemakers named Thich Nhat Hanh. Thich Nhat Hanh is a remarkable Buddhist monk from Vietnam. Hanh is a peace activist who lived and worked most of his life in a monastery. He is called Thay for teacher. As a Buddhist, Hanh understands that everyone suffers in life. Whether that’s from small things like jealousy or larger issues like war, violence, death and injustice. The Buddha also taught that pursuit of the next new thing will never make us happy. Accepting suffering as part of life will allow us to continue to get through life knowing that suffering is part of living and that suffering doesn’t mean we will never have happiness again. I think this is so interesting in today’s world. Here we are in a pandemic and many people are unwilling to wear a mask to protect others. They are unwilling to social distance to save lives. They continue to gather to go the beach, attend parties etc…because their personal pursuit of happiness is more important than anything else. Thay as a Buddhist practices meditation. I also practice meditation as a Christian and I bet many of you do too. I think this intentional time with God can bring us close to our Creator and help us to understand that God is truly at the ground of our being and connects us to life itself. Thays’ Buddhism isn’t just about sitting in silence. Until his stroke a few years ago he was an activist and practiced engaged Buddhism. He wanted to save the people in the Vietnam war from the violence, death and suffering they were experiencing. He founded a group called Interbeing. They believed in non violent protests of the war, without choosing sides, he cared for all the people. Thay came to the U.S. to speak in 1966 and met with Dr Martin Luther King Jr. They had a lot in common because they both wanted peace and equality and wanted to change things through non violent means. They knew that people themselves were not the enemy but the ideology people held could be lead a person to violence and destruction. Thay was forbidden from re-entering Vietnam by the government and sought asylum in France where he continued his work and built the Plum Village Monastary. He worked to help refugees who fled Vietnam build a life in France. He is truly a great man who has been an influence on Christians throughout the world. I see him who is somebody who is so in touch with the Creator that he embodies what it means to bring justice to all people, to bring peace to this world and to do it all with loving kindness.

We have been studying the book of Job in our book club and of course Job is enduring immense amounts of suffering throughout the book and receives very little kindness. He does however keep on talking to God, wrestling with this idea of intense suffering and the possibility of death and the grief of losing his family. Through it all he retains a resiliency and desire to live that is kind of astonishing. He never seems separated from God. Our next book will also focus on a man who went through immense suffering in the holocaust. Man’s search for meaning. Suffering is a part of life but we can be part of the pain or part of the loving kindness of God as we bear witness to suffering. It’s interesting that during such a global pandemic as this we are all suffering to some degree as a world. We are all witnesses to the pain caused by living in such a time where all of us are affected on some level. We are reminded by Jesus and by Paul today that we aren’t alone dealing with any of this. We are connected. Just as Jesus and God are one, we too are part of this God who is the foundation of our very existence. We are all capable of saving people from violence, food insecurity, injustice on some level. Whether that’s to be the voice to protect someone in your community, to pray for all those who are not safe, to support a refuge organization…. there is no shortage of causes or ways to seek a more peaceful world. I’d like to leave you with these words of Hahn that remind us what it means to know that God abides in us and in every person on this earth. “God abides in Creation itself. You carry Mother Earth within you. She is not outside of you. Mother Earth is not just your environment. In that insight of inter-being, it is possible to have real communication with the Earth, which is the highest form of prayer.”