

The first time I read the words from the book of Acts, I was struck by the line that Paul found inscribed on an altar. “to the god nobody knows.” Mostly because the preacher in me admired what Paul does with his next breath. Paul is in Athens. The centre of intellect and rhetoric. The homes of Zeus and the whole pantheon of Greek Gods and Paul says, “. I’m here to introduce you to this God so you can worship intelligently, know who you’re dealing with.” (Acts 17:23) It is just as powerful thousands of years later. Is it any wonder that Paul is responsible for introducing so many communities to the good news of Jesus? Paul travelled extensively and wherever goes, he finds a group of people interested in hearing about Jesus. He goes to people’s homes and public squares and finds a way to connect their everyday lives to the good news of Jesus.

I’m going to press rewind on our reading because Paul wasn’t supposed to preaching in Athens. At the beginning of chapter 17 it describes how Paul had to be taken by stealth out of Thessalonica. The leaders in the

community did not like the Word that Paul was teaching in their community. With the help of his friends and supporters Paul makes his way to Athens where he is waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him.

As Paul explores Athens he sees idols everywhere. One translation of this text says he was deeply distressed by all the idols and another says, “The longer Paul waited in Athens for Silas and Timothy, the angrier he got—all those idols! The city was a junkyard of idols.” (Acts 17: 16) It is almost like Paul can’t help himself. He sees the idols everywhere and needs to share a message of hope. So Paul begins talking about the good news of Jesus with the Jewish community and other like-minded people in the city. Some philosophers hear what Paul is saying about Jesus’ resurrection and they want to know more. They take Paul to a quieter place at the Areopagus to hear more.

Up to this point, Paul’s message has been directed to the Jewish community. This a new audience filled with the Athenian elite which

requires a different kind of message. It says in Acts, “So Paul took his stand in the open space at the Areopagus and laid it out for them. “It is plain to see that you Athenians take your religion seriously. When I arrived here the other day, I was fascinated with all the shrines I came across. And then I found one inscribed, to the god nobody knows. I’m here to introduce you to this God so you can worship intelligently, know who you’re dealing with.” (Acts 17: 22 – 23)

The God that Paul introduces the Athenians to that day is one we know. It is the God who created the world, a God who doesn’t need human shrines, a God who is always near. Then Paul quotes a poem by the Greek poet Aratus, “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.’” (Acts 17:28) Then comes Paul’s big conclusion, “Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has

overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (Acts 17:29 – 31)

Paul’s preaching that day did not spark faith in everyone. It says in our reading, “When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” At that point Paul left them. But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” (Acts 17: 32 – 34)

You may be wondering what a sermon preached over 2000 years ago in Athens has to do with us today? We are in a time when fewer people know the good news of Jesus. People haven’t heard about the ways that Jesus touches our lives with hope. People haven’t the message of God’s deep and abiding grace. It is up to us who’ve heard the story to share it. And just like

Paul did in Athens, to use the things that people are familiar with to inspire curiosity and faith. Music, poetry, art, justice, community, compassion can all be reminders of God's deep and abiding love for us in Jesus.

Dr. Matt Skinner writes, "The gospel sounds different everyplace it is told. That's because the gospel does not exist in some unadulterated form in isolation from human language, culture, or presuppositions. It's always enfleshed in some way--linguistically, culturally, personally. How would we understand it, or recognize it as good news for us, if it weren't?" [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=886](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=886)

In every age they found ways to proclaim the gospel. In April of 1894 right here at Cochrane Street there was a successful missionary service with preaching by a variety of preachers. That was one tool. What tool to share the gospel can we use for today? We live in a time of increased curiosity about faith and spirituality. The spiritually section in our books

stores keeps growing. People have question and want to know more. As the culture shifts and changes, we need to find our own way to respond to that culture and to make the good news come to life for today.

Perhaps you can take some time this week to think about the ways that good news has touched your life or ways you've felt God come close and share that moment with a friend. Maybe as you listen to the radio or read a book you will find something that reminds of the ways that God is at work in your life. Maybe that will help others connect to God.

Whenever those moments happen, it seems to me that God is reaching out to me in the most unexpected ways. A few years ago, I was struggling with what to do for one of our Holy Week services. I was sitting in my car, the radio on, and I heard a song by Great Big World called "Say Something." It was like I heard Peter's story of denying Jesus three times in song. Here are the words,

"Say something, I'm giving up on you  
I'll be the one, if you want me to

Anywhere, I would've followed you  
Say something, I'm giving up on  
you” (Great Big World, Say Something)

God is always finding new ways to reach us  
– to make those great introductions. We too can  
be like Paul who saw that shrine to the god that  
nobody knows and took it upon himself to  
introduce people to God. The story of God’s  
love and mercy is all around us. It is our calling  
to make that unknown God known and as we do  
God’s guiding grace will be with us. Amen.