

***Adventures with Paul – Paul’s Evangelism  
Being In God  
Acts 17: 16-34  
18 July 2021  
Sermon preached by Rev. Jessica McCrae***

A kindergarten teacher asked the class, "What is the color of apples?" Most of the children answered red. A couple said green. But one student raised her hand and said white. The teacher tried to explain that apples could be red or green or even golden. But never white. But the student was adamant, and finally said, "Look inside."

Which is exactly what we find our friend Paul doing this morning as his adventures continue in Athens, he is looking inside, looking

deeper to understand what it is the Athenians are looking for in their spiritual life. He is looking inside their hearts to find some common ground that will create dialogue between them so that he might share the good news he has discovered in Jesus. Today’s adventure is about something Paul is well known for, his evangelizing, but he doesn’t do it in a fire and brimstone, convert or else sort of way. Paul makes a point of meeting the people of Athens where they are in order that they might build a mutually respectful relationship that will lead to deeper conversation. He is meeting them where they are so that the people of Athens might recognize the Spirit of God in the

midst of their day to day life, encouraging them to look a little bit deeper, to look inside, and find the God that is within all we do.

The Athenians were a very inquisitive and curious group of people, highly intellectual, always looking for new ideas and new understandings of the world around them. On the one hand they are the ideal group for Paul to talk with, because they are hungry to learn; on the other hand though, they are the most difficult – highly educated and highly sceptical. Paul has his work cut out for him, and so he begins by drawing upon what the people already know, and what Paul knows they are seeking.

We are told that throughout Athens monuments and altars paid tribute to the wondrous works for different gods. The Athenians were very religious people. In his travels through the city Paul noticed an inscription on a monument that read simply, “To an unknown God.” They worshipped many Gods, but the inscription to the “unknown god”, that God whose identity the Athenians are longing to find, opens the door for Paul’s discussion of his understanding of the risen Christ.

And so Paul begins to explain these difficult concepts of resurrection after death, of eternal

life for all, and this is no easy task. We modern Christians have enough doubts and questions about this theology, but the highly logical Athenians find these ideas utterly absurd. Life after death? Resurrection? These things do not happen. It can not be explained and it goes against every law in the natural world. And with that they give Paul a sceptical look and say 'Prove it.' And Paul finds himself in a difficult bind. There is no proof, per se. Not the kind the Athenians are used to anyway. There is in fact little evidence available at all, only grace, only faith. But Athens, the university town of its day, requires more than faith, they want a fully

rationalized argument that they can mull over and debate, something they can sink their teeth into.

And so Paul begins his argument, his analogy, with something the people understand, the changing seasons as described by one of Athens own poets Epimenides, "in this we live and move and have our being". Paul tells them that just as within the natural rhythms and cycles of nature we find our life – our food, our resources, our shelter, our very life, the same is true of God. "In him we live and move and have our being." Just as the seasons change, life leads to death and death leads to new life in

spring, so too does Christ offer transformation and new life to us. All that we have is from God. This God who is made fully known in Jesus Christ, this God who offers resurrection life freely to all, this God to whom they refer as “unknown” can be known, in and through the very life we live, in the creation of which we are all a part.

Well, it was a start. Some of the Athenians understood and appreciated the analogy he was drawing. I imagine some had sat out in their gardens studying their poetry and academics and, having found peace in nature at one point in their lives were able to understand how perhaps one really could really get into the heart of a

loving god by looking to the beauty and mystery of creation. But there were others, many many more who criticized Paul and laughed at his attempt to bridge the gap between faith and academics. They just simply could not be moved.

I have always been able to sympathize with Paul, he had a hard job that day in Athens. It is no easy thing trying to persuade people to open their eyes and hearts, trying to encourage people to have faith in something that may seem very far removed from their own experiences. As a preacher, every Sunday I want you to understand what it is I need to say, but much like Paul I don't

have a lot of real concrete evidence, stories and faith to share. Sometimes it is enough, and sometimes it is not. Reason can take us only so far, and then we must rely solely on faith, a gift – grace – from God to help us. All any of us can do for one another is to point to things that help us to better understand the love of God in Christ. It is then up to each one of us to make the connections for ourselves, to open our eyes and our hearts to really see God here.

So this morning, this summer, I am going to point to this little corner of the world in which we live. I am pointing to the cycle of life, death and rebirth that is occurring everyday around us in

our communities, in our gardens, in the river that runs beside us and the lake that sustains us. I am pointing to the gift of hope that comes with the planting of seeds and the birth of new babies and new animals. I am pointing to the simple miracle that all of this has been given to us in order that we may live. I am asking you to truly find God, not in the things we create, not in this church building or in your career or your house, but find God within all that those things are dependent upon. Find God in the land that feeds us, in the garden that feed the insects that pollinate our food and brings beauty to our day and nourishment to our bodies, in the valley

through which our river runs, and the lake that moderates our weather and provides a place for re-creation for our souls as well as food and water for our bodies. Find God in this beautiful earth that we call home and remind yourself again today that it is in God that we depend. It is in Christ that we live and move and have our being. Proof of God's love and concern for humanity was all around the Athenians, and it is all around us too. We just need to remember.

May you remember today and throughout this summer season those things that are truly wonderful. Venture outside the sanctuary of this church building into the holiness of God's

creation. Find within it not just God, but our own purpose as co-creators and care-givers of this land entrusted to us. Hold in thankful prayer the tree and the flower, the sky above and the earth below. Discover the wonder of it all. Pause for a moment and be awed by the fact that you are standing here, alive and breathing amidst it all. This is holy ground, in which we live and move and have our being. May you never doubt it. Amen.