

May 14, 2023
6th Sunday of Easter
Acts 17:16-31, 1 Peter 3:13-22, John 14:15-21
“Know The Unknown God”
Hymns, 469,556,501,821

Even though a lot of people today say they believe in God, they tend to believe themselves to be more spiritual rather than identify with a specific church or denomination. In fact, they are very general about their belief that there is something out there but refuse to go any further when it comes to a specific doctrine or teaching.

So the question is “how on earth do you ever reach skeptical people? They think they know what needs to be known about God but in the end it’s really up to each individual what anybody thinks is right or true.

In our Scripture reading for today the Apostle Paul is walking down the streets of Athens, Greece and look at how he starts his speech: “Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: “To An Unknown God.”

You see the people of Athens were very spiritual – they set up statues devoted to all different kinds of gods all over the city. Every street corner had its own god, and it was up to you to decide which god you liked.

Deep down inside, though, people in Athens knew that they were probably forgetting a god along the way, and so they wanted to “cover all their bases” by having an altar devoted to an unknown god, just to be on the safe side.

Doesn’t this remind you of our world today? In North America, there are all different kinds of religions, ways to believe, all different versions of god, and it’s simply up to you to decide which god you like.

Whichever version of god makes you the most happy, that's the god that people pick but no one really knows which god is the right one. So, to make themselves feel better, people say, "It doesn't matter which god you believe in, as long as you believe in something."

Just to make light of this in a funny way. In his book, *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah describes an interview with a very religious woman named Sheila. She said, "I believe in God. I can't remember the last time I went to church but my faith has carried me a long way. It's called 'Sheilaism.' And all I have to do is just listen to my own little voice."

On a recent morning drive radio broadcast, an economist commented on how successful companies are even learning how to tap into the feelings of people who are working for them because they say, "we are a very spiritual society."

So today people are spiritual and they want God on their own terms just as the Greeks had their different idols for their gods but deep down inside, people know that they're missing something about what the true God is and so God doesn't just want people to live in ignorance about him and forever believe what they want. – That's why God sent the Apostle Paul to Athens.

Look at how Paul describes the true God, "The God who made the world and everything in it, is the Lord of heaven and earth, and does not live in temples built by hands."

What Paul is trying to say is that, God is the one who made all people, and God is the one who allows nations and governments to come together so God sets up exactly when and where people live. There is an order to things. Everything comes from a source. It's not a result of some accident or happen-stance.

This might be a lot different from how people picture God today. They might say God didn't make the world, it developed on its own. God doesn't give me life – I give myself life by earning a paycheck and as far as when and where people live, that's just a combination of accident, luck, and people's choices. That's what I believe but it is not God.

God says NO. Look outside the window. Everything you see – every plant, every animal, every machine and building, every person – ultimately, I made it all, God says. I made the natural resources. I have made everything.

Now it's true that you bring home that paycheck, but if it weren't for me, God says, you wouldn't be able to work – you wouldn't even be able to breathe. And it's not just an accident or your brilliant planning that has brought you to this place now. God says. I have set up exactly where you live, and exactly when you should live.

Think about how a mother sets up everything for her child – she sets up what the child's room looks like, when the child will be in the kitchen, when the child will be in the bedroom, what the child will play with – the mother sets up all kinds of things for her child. That's what God does for you. He sets up where you live, and when you live. He brings you to life, He puts you here, in this place and at this time.

We tend to think that it's simply by chance, or by choice, that we are here, but God tells us that He is behind much more of what goes on in our lives than we realize.

And that might make us ask why? Why has God given me life? What is the purpose of my life? Why has God placed me here, at this place, and at this time? What is God looking for from me?

And we find the answer in the next verse: "God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though He is not far from each one of us." That's why God has set up your life the way he has – so that you would seek him.

You have questions. Great. You want to learn more. Good for you. You're looking for answers. That's terrific. And as you look and keep looking, perhaps, you will find the true God. That's why God has set up your life the way He has.

Paul told the people in Athens that they shouldn't be satisfied with their version of religion – He says, "Since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by man's design and skill."

Don't be satisfied with that, Paul told the people. "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent." Remember, the word "repent" contains the picture of someone making a u-turn.

Right now, Paul is telling the people, you are ignorant about the true God – you're trying to make up things, and it's just not working. Make a u-turn – repent, and turn to the true God who can save you.

But unfortunately as we read, many people then, and today, don't repent. God hopes that people seek him and find him, but many don't. So many people are content to stumble through life.

But what about you and me? God has been gracious to us, and He has brought us to the knowledge of the truth and that is a huge blessing and a true gift that we cherish but one of our biggest problems for us is that many times we tend to stop learning.

Christians often make the mistake of stopping the growth process by cutting back on hearing the Word. We keep God at arm's length, a casual acquaintance, even though God wants to be our close personal friend.

It can be very tragic when a person never comes to faith, never finds the true God, and dies an unbeliever but it's doubly tragic when a person becomes a Christian and simply stops growing and perhaps even loses their faith.

So what is the most important thing that God wants you to know about him? You can sum it up with one very common symbol and that is the symbol of the cross. This is what God wants you to know. Very simply it goes like this.

He wants you to know that 2000 years ago, on a cross, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, died a horrible death. God wants you to know that this death was a payment for your sins and that this death has made you right with God. This death is truly your ticket to heaven.

But God also wants you to know that this death was followed by Christ's resurrection and God's way of saying, "I forgive each and every one of you for your sins." If you want to know anything about the unknown God, that's it.

This true story is what God wants you to know. That is why you are here, born in a certain time, in a certain place, so that you might learn and believe this good news. It's simple beautiful story of how much God loves you and wants to look after you.

Just think about what it's like to be a little child. The little child doesn't always understand why their mother does the things that she does. Why does mom want me to get up at this time, and eat this food, and play in this room, and go over here, and do this and do that? Why? The little child doesn't always understand – maybe even disagrees with their mother and throws a tantrum.

The point is, that the child may not understand that their mother is doing these things, so that the child will grow up to be healthy and happy but that's how it is between you and God.

You may wonder to yourself, why has God set up my life the way He has? What is the purpose of my life? Why am I here? What am I doing? Sometimes you might even disagree with God, the way He has set up your life, maybe you might even throw a temper tantrum once in a while.

So what is God's ultimate purpose, for designing your life the way He has? The answer is, so that you would seek Him, and find Him, and know that He has made everything right between you and Him by sending his Son. That's the connection.

And when that connection is made then the searching stops and you know that God is listening, watching and providing, no matter what you are going through. That's when you know you have peace with the one true God because everything else then focuses upon Him. He's in the driver's seat and we are simply along for the ride. That's the kind of God we have and know.

So if you came to church today discouraged, He knows, and He wants to lift you up. Depressed? He wants to cheer you up. Feeling spiritually dirty? He wants to clean you up! God knows how you feel...and furthermore...He cares! Have you ever felt rejected? He's been there! Physically worn out? He's been there! Disappointed in others? Burdened? God who was the bread of life began His ministry hungry. He who was the water of life ended His ministry thirsty. He knows what you have or are going through. There is a connection. There is a relationship and because of that you are in good hands.

And because He who was weary, has now become our rest. He who paid taxes is now the king of the universe. He who was called a devil, has now cast out demons. He who prayed, now hears our prayers and He who wept, now dries our tears. God not only connects with us but also provides for us. This is the true God. The one in which we have a real life relationship with. The one who has history but is with us each and every day and promises to be with us now and forever more.

The God that we know was the one who was sold for 30 pieces of silver that redeemed the world. The God that we know was the one who was led as a lamb to the slaughter to be our Good Shepherd. The God that we know was the one who not only sympathizes with us in every way, but took upon Himself the pain and punishment of our sinful lives to make us right with Him and put our names in the book of life forever.

That is how we know about the unknown God. We have a God that knows us inside and out. He is our personal God and He loves us and today we thank Him that we know and believe in this "unknown" God because He has been made known to us through His Son Jesus. May God bless us and keep us in the saving truth of His Word and promise of hope to everlasting life in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.