

Sixth Sunday of Easter Year A

Being a Witness for the God We Know

[RCL] Acts 17:22-31; Psalm 66:7-18; 1 Peter 3:13-22; John 14:15-21

The Book of Acts is filled with miracles, visions, and dreams, and in it, the author, Luke, helps us establish the identity of God and shows how the Gospel of Jesus Christ was spread to every corner of the world.

In addition to teaching about the identity of God, Luke has much to say about the power of the grace of God and the initiatives God takes in forming witnesses for mission. Luke penned for us a road map to *being a witness for the God we know*.

The second part of the Book of Acts focuses on the story of Paul. And that is where we find ourselves on this Sixth Sunday of Easter. Paul said to the people of Athens, “I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 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’” (Acts 17:22b-28a).

We are familiar with Paul; he is known for his eloquent speeches and great witness to Christ, and there is much we can learn from him. Following his conversion experience, he became one of the greatest teachers ever, one of the greatest evangelists ever. Paul's view of the spiritual life can serve as a foundation for a contemporary evangelical spirituality.

Paul knew God. Paul was in right relationship with God. And when you are in right relationship with someone, you want to defend them at all costs. That is what Paul is doing in Athens. He realizes that the Athenians do not know much about anything because they do not know the first thing about the God he serves.

And he goes on to do something very important that we in the modern Church can recognize, understand, and appreciate. Even though he was deeply distressed by all the idols of the city, he did not get up on that large rock and point his finger at the people of Athens, telling them that they would go straight to hell because of their idol worship and their non-Christian ways of living. Rather, he speaks to their culture, through their culture, in a way that acknowledged their worthiness as children of God. He was a true witness of the God he served.

Paul begins to tell them about this unknown God that they already are trying to worship. Note that Paul does not condemn the Athenians for who they are; nor does he begin with what

separates them, but with what they have in common. Remember that the next time you are a witness to the God you know.

Paul knew God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He knew God as the One who keeps promises. He knew God as a God of a second chance, and a God that saves, a God that can convert. He knew God as a God of love. Paul told one group that God was a “living God who made the heaven and the earth and the sea” (Acts 14:15), and he told the people of Athens that he was the One in whom we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

Who do you know God as? Who do we know God as? We cannot tell of something or someone that we do not know. As Christians, we know God as a way-maker, as a provider, as the author of our books called Life. The God we know is fair and just, generous and good. Our God is a loving, healing God. A right-on-time God. The God we know is a forgiving, gracious God because heaven knows we do not get it right all the time. We know God as Redeemer, Reconciler, Restorer and Resurrector, just to name a few.

That is who we know God as. And the God we serve proves this over and over and over again. The God we serve places the right people in the right places to make things happen at the right time, giving us unmerited favor. And the God we serve makes a way when there seems to be no way.

Sadly, there are individuals who do not know this God. Painfully, the knowledge of the God we know is not everywhere you turn, because people do not really know who God is, and what God has done, and can do. God, for some, is only a God to question or blame or accuse or even curse when things go wrong. Many people believe that God is some sort of vengeful deity that must be appeased by good behavior, just in case! But that is not the God that Paul proclaimed.

As Paul tells us, there really is a God who loves everyone, especially you and me! And yes, our enemies as well. A God who came to serve us. Our God, who has given everyone life and being, and is interested in every little part of your life, no matter how insignificant it may seem.

God’s love, care, and identity have been made abundantly clear in the person and work of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. That God should be known by everyone!

And therein lies our responsibility as Christians. We must bear witness to the God we know. In the person and work of Jesus, all the doubts and fears and anxieties over the “unknown God” happily disappear. God is not a distant, uncaring God. God is a very close and personal God.

So who do you know God as? Who do we know God as? Do we live, move and have our being in God?! We cannot tell of something accurately if we do not know for ourselves, first-hand. You cannot give directions to a place if you do not know where it is. Similarly, we cannot share a God we do not know for ourselves with others, or people will get lost.

We are charged with being a witness for the God we know. We are charged with telling somebody about this God. Tell people about the love God has shown us in Jesus Christ. Our God should no longer be unknown. Our God is too good and too generous to remain that way.

God is the God who is known by loving-kindness to us, shown in the One who lived and died and rose again, so that we too might live with God. Each time we approach God's altar, we are saying, "We believe. We believe in a God whose only begotten Son died for us all." We are saying, "God, You are in me and I in You."

But it does not stop there. When we make our way to God's altar and ultimately out of the doors of the church, that is where the real work begins. We are all called to be witnesses to the God we know – and our lives, our beings, our very essence should always, always reflect that.

It is like the hymn writer penned, inspired by the Song of Mary, mother of Jesus,

"Tell out, my soul, the glories of God's Word! Firm is God promise, and God's mercy sure. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord to children's children and for evermore!"

We have got work to do.

Amen.

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