

May 29, 2011
 Sermon for Sixth Sunday of Easter
 St Peter Lutheran Church
 Bowie, TX
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor
 Acts 17:16-31 (ESV)
 The Unknown God

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

¹⁶ Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “What does this babblers wish to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ And they took hold of him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰ For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new. ²² So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ ²⁹ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. ³⁰ The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

¹ *The Holy Bible : English Standard Version*. Wheaton : Standard Bible Society, 2001

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Amen.

When today's reading from the book of Acts opens, Paul is in Athens waiting for Silas and Timothy. While he is waiting, Paul takes a tour of the town and sees the spiritual ignorance of the people. The Greeks of Paul's day considered themselves very spiritually astute, but their spirituality was based on the lies of Satan, this world, and their own sinful nature.

When Paul saw this, he was unable to remain silent. He began to preach the Gospel of Christ in the synagogue and the market place to anyone who would listen. When Paul's message made it to the right people, he was invited to speak to those who considered themselves the great thinkers of the day.

It has been estimated that, at Paul's time, Athens contained over 25,000 religious statues and monuments. The one that caught Paul's eye was the one labeled *To the Unknown God*. Paul saw his opportunity to relate to the people in a medium they could relate to and he seized it. Paul began to explain the unknown God who loved people enough to sacrifice His son for them.

It isn't hard for us to picture an ancient society with no knowledge of the one true God. We can even picture a modern culture in some far away land without knowledge of the one true God. But today, I want you to think about the fact that the unknown God of ancient Greece is still the unknown God to many people in Montague County as well as Texas and even the whole country.

We need to ask ourselves, "Why is that true?"

God is the unknown God because He is the unseen God.

People say they need to see the Lord. They need to see the real Lord, the true Lord. In his Gospel account, John tells about some Greeks who came to Philip and said, "*Sir, we would like to see Jesus*" (John 12:21). The same is true today. People would like to see Jesus. They need to see Jesus. But, too often, they don't see Jesus. Why?

Consider the ungodly people in this country. Whether they are the majority or a minority makes no difference. Look at what they are allowed to accomplish in their effort to keep people from seeing Jesus.

They use our constitution for their own purposes when they deny the spiritual base this country was founded upon. These people have successfully removed the Ten Commandments, not to mention prayer, from our schools. And they are currently succeeding in removing them from our courthouses.

They remain on high alert to be sure that Jesus is never a part of Christmas plays and musicals...Oh, excuse me, Holiday plays and musicals. They have gained enough influence to get retail stores to ignore all Christian signs of Christmas or Easter. They show no shame in suing any city that would put a nativity scene on city property. In fact, when they sue these cities they see themselves heroes of freedom.

They praise government support for things like The National Endowment for the Arts, which has no qualms about funding so called "art" that defames the image of Christ.

Why are these folks so determined in their war against Christianity?
Because they don't want people to see Jesus. And, if the people should see Jesus, they want them to see a perverted image of Jesus – never the real Jesus.

To many, God is still the unknown God because He is not served.

When Joshua was about to lead the Children of Israel into the promised land, he issued a challenge to them. He said, *"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"* (Joshua 24:15).

Joshua said this to the Israelites. He wasn't talking to the heathen nations they were about to encounter. He was speaking to people who were very aware of the true God. Do you see what I'm getting at? While believing in God is not, Serving God is a choice. It's not something that is forced upon people. Even those who claim the name Christian must decide whether or not they will serve God or deny Him, leaving God behind for the false gods of the world. Therein lies a problem. More people want to be called Christian than want to be Christian.

Someone once said that the only thing necessary for evil to thrive is for good men to do nothing. That statement is very true. The vacuum created by good people doing nothing will always be filled with evil – guaranteed!
Why do we live in a country that has countless laws to protect animals but condones the murder of a million unborn babies ever year? While I'm sure God loves all of His creations, which do you think God places a higher value on – a baby with a soul or a yellow cheeked warbler?

Why do we live in a country where the Gideons are forbidden to hand out Bibles in our schools but Planned Parenthood can distribute birth control and condoms to our school children?

Why do we live in a country that gives Bibles to people in prison, but discourages giving Bibles to children before they start down the road that leads to prison?

These things are the way they are because God is the unknown God to too many people in this country. And that happens because too many people who claim the name of Jesus don't spend any time serving Jesus. They have other priorities; the economy, foreign policy, a women's right to chose, political correctness so as not to offend.

We also fail to serve God when we fail to speak about God. Paul told the Corinthian church: *"With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore [we] speak"* (2 Corinthians 4:13). And the psalmist cries out: *"Let the redeemed of the Lord say so"* (Psalm 107:2).

Many people don't know about God because too many Christians fail to speak about God. If they are to know, we must tell them. Christians keeping God to themselves was a problem even in Paul's day. This is what he told the Roman Christians: *"How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"* (Romans 10:14).

Quite often we hear people speak of finding the Lord but, in reality, it is always the other way around. We don't find Jesus. He finds us.

God has been finding people since the day He walked through the Garden of Eden calling to Adam: "*Where are you?*" (Genesis 3:9).

Because of sinful human nature, just like Adam, people try to hide from God. But the love of God is relentless in seeking people. Jesus told about God's love for people when he said: "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.*" (Luke 19:10).

God's love is what motivates the Holy Spirit to seek God's lost children. Jesus said: "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*" (John 6:44). That drawing occurs through the action of the Holy Spirit.

When the Spirit of God convicts the heart of an unbeliever, He creates a longing for God. If the unbeliever responds to the Spirit's conviction, and that person calls on the name of God, he or she is saved. If the person rejects the faith the Spirit brings, that person condemns himself or herself to eternity in hell.

Jesus instructs us to seek first the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33). Seeking the kingdom of God and praying "*Thy will be done*" (Matthew 6:10) are the same things. When we seek God's kingdom we work to do God's will. So, what is God's will?

It's God's will that his church grow and his lost children be found.

One of the most important ways God seeks His lost children is through His found children. Scripture says: "*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17).

If we are truly seeking God's kingdom and the fulfillment of His will, then we take Jesus seriously when He says:

"As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). And, when He tells us to: *"Go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"* (Matthew 28:19-20). And we GO!

We are all saved sinners. We were all condemned to eternity in hell until the grace of God covered our sins with the blood of Jesus. Because of that fact, out of sheer gratitude to God, it should be our greatest pleasure to introduce an unbelieving world to the Unknown God. I pray that we will seize every opportunity to proclaim the name of Christ.

You have heard of the unknown God. You know His name, His Holy Spirit dwells within you, His Son died for your sins so that by faith in Him you have the promise of eternal life. It's your time to go. Don't worry about how or when, God will let you know and provide a way for you to get there, just listen, Be still and know that He is God (Ps. 46:10)

God will take care of the rest.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.