6th Sunday of Easter

Sermon

Acts 17:22-31

While serving as a missionary in Africa, I had the opportunity to meet a number of people who were of the Muslim faith. In the small town where we lived, the shop owners in town were mostly owned by Indians. The British Colonial government brought over settlers from India in the 1900’s to help create commerce. They came with their experience and knowledge for business. They also brought their religion. In fact, in the middle of this small town was a large mosque where they whet to pray every day.

Most of the shop owners knew I was an American Missionary. They would often engage me in conversation about things going on in the world, especially as it pertained to what was happening in America. As we would talk, the conversation would sometimes turn to religion. I was amazed at how much they knew about the Bible. They would talk about Jesus and mention many of the stories in the Bible. I learned that their book, called the Koran, affirms Jesus’ virgin birth and the many miracles he did. Eleven times the Koran called Jesus the Messiah. The anointed one who was to come. However, this all took place so that Jesus could point people to Allah and his prophet, Muhammad. They liked to portray themselves as being very religious. They would point to the fact that they prayed 5 times a day every day. They fasted during the month of Ramadan. They liked to try and make me feel that I was not religious. I did not know the truth. They did. That Jesus is just a prophet. He is not God.

It was very sad. They were religious. They had knowledge. But knowledge is not enough. There is a difference between knowledge and knowing. They knew of Jesus, but they did not know who Jesus is!

Last Sunday we were reminded by Peter to remember who we are. Today Paul telling us to **Remember who Jesus is!**

They were very religious! That is what Paul said in our text. Our text in Acts continues with Paul in Athens.  He got there after being run out of Berea, and that’s what makes the story of his experience in Athens so interesting. Up until now, he appealed to the Jews. He wanted them to **know who Jesus is**. The Promised Messiah of the Jewish faith.  While some believed, others were openly hostile. That got him into trouble time and again.

Not so in Athens.  Here Paul makes his appeal, not to a Jewish audience, but to the most learned, well-educated, sophisticated scholars of the day.

**22Then Paul stood up in front of the council of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious in every way. 23For as I was walking around and carefully observing your objects of worship, I even found an altar on which had been inscribed, ‘To an unknown god.’ Now what you worship as unknown—this is what I am going to proclaim to you.**

Among those who heard Paul were some philosophers.   Their business was to mull over and debate the great mysteries of life.  For example: If a tree falls in the forest, but there’s no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?  So, when they heard Paul speaking what sounded like a new theory of salvation, their ears perked up. Oh, religion, we know a thing or two about this. Paul saw that they knew what it meant to be religious. The whole area showed that to be true. They thought they knew what that meant. That they had covered all their bases. But Paul taught his audience that there is a big difference between knowledge and knowing. Today with the help of our text, we can learn the same thing, and be reminded once again, **know** **who Jesus is!**

“**The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made with hands. 25Neither is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all people life and breath and everything they have. 26From one man, he made every nation of mankind to live over the entire face of the earth. He determined the appointed times and the boundaries where they would live. 27He did this so they would seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘Indeed, we are also his offspring.’**

**29“Therefore, since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by human skill and planning. 30Although God overlooked the times of ignorance, he is now commanding all people everywhere to repent, 31because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness by the man he appointed. He provided proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”**

At this point we can almost hear his audience gasp.  “Whoa!!  You hold on there just a minute, young whippersnapper,” the Athens Philosophers may have said.  After all, Paul’s audience was right with him while he talked about creation’s beauty and order, they knew we are the children of the gods as their own poets said. It all made sense to these religious people.  But when his talk turns to this Jesus… a Jew….. whom people crucified….. but God raised from the dead, he leaves part of his audience behind.

They had knowledge but that was different from knowing. What was the problem. Why would many of them have been turned off? They did not like the word repent! Repent? For what? What am I doing wrong? We are religious. We have things covered.

As I began this sermon I mentioned the Indian Muslims I met in Africa. They were religious. And they knew Jesus. Their Book even says that Jesus will come again on the last day to be the judge. He will judge those who do not believe. Sounds right, doesn’t it? But there is a twist. They say he will condemn those who believe in him… who say he is the savior. Who say he is the Son of God. Their book says that Jesus will say their false god Allah is the one. How sad. Knowledge is not knowing.

Knowledge is getting things from the outside and putting it in your mind, and we can control how much and what kind enters our mind. Knowing, on the other hand, like wind, cannot be gathered, controlled or held. It can only be felt. And we see its effect.

I remember Jesus himself using the example of the wind when teaching a very religious man named Nikodemus. Perhaps we have heard this story before, but it is good to hear it again. How God makes it possible for us to know who Jesus really is! **Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.” 3Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203:1-16#fen-NIV-26124a)**]” 4“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” 5Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spiritgives birth to spirit. 7You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203:1-16#fen-NIV-26128c)**] must be born again.’ 8The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked. 10“You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? 11Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.[**[**e**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203:1-16#fen-NIV-26134e)**] 14Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,[**[**f**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%203:1-16#fen-NIV-26135f)**] 15that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

I wonder if Paul felt sad, when many of the religious people of his time, who had all this knowledge about god, but really didn’t know the true God. Did not know Jesus.

I was sad while in Africa that my Muslim friends did not know who Jesus really is. But want makes me even sadder, is what is the example in this next story:

A car on the highway cut off a Ford Explorer. The driver of the car was not paying attention. The Ford then sped up and passed the car, almost hitting it.   Covering the entire back window of the Explore, was a larger-than-life picture of Jesus with a crown of thorns on his head. A hand came out of the passenger window with another sign. It was just one finger. Was the driver and perhaps everyone in the car a Christian? The sign on the back window gave the indication, but the sign out the window gave the exact opposite.

Sound familiar? Who is driving the Ford? What about the one in the passenger’s side? I have to admit, it is me! Is sounds like me? The story reminds us of this fact. God knows us! He is very aware of our sin. The sin we struggle with every day. That is why it is so important that we know who Jesus is!

Knowing who Jesus is means letting the wind blow. Let the it come in. Faith! Not just the knowledge but the knowing. How? I saw the quote from Benjamin Franklin.

**“Tell me, and I forget;  
Teach me, and I remember;  
Involve me, and I learn.” (Benjamin Franklin)**

Jesus says to you and to me. Come, I invite you to join me. I want to involve you. Come learn form me! You are forgiven. Your sins are covered. Now, you can show it! Show your faith. That is being religious.

Over the past months there have been a number of conversations about the Stay at Home orders. Are they right? Do we have to obey them? Why can’s we just open? I don’t like it? In fact, I am just going to behave like that driver of the Ford. I say to myself first, and the to us all. No! **Remember who Jesus is.**

Live your live of faith!

**Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats[**[**b**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20PETER%203:8-22#fen-NIV-30439b)**]; do not be frightened.”[**[**c**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20PETER%203:8-22#fen-NIV-30439c)**] 15But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. (1 Peter 2:13-18)**

The life of faith is best described by Martin Luther, “If there is anything good in us, it is not our own, it is a gift of God. But if it is a gift then it is entirely a debt one owes to love. And if it is a debt owed to love, then I must serve others with it, not myself.

**Amen**