

This recorded Sermon was preached at Good Shepherd Baptist Church
By Rev. Stephen Guantai
On May 17th, 2020
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Scripture: Acts 17: 22-31

Message: "Who Is This Unknown God"

Perhaps some of you may have heard this story before, so bear with me, because it resonates with what I am about to share with you today.

A story is told of two mischievous boys who used to drive their mom crazy. One day, the mother called her pastor and asked him to speak to her boys, so they can learn how to behave in the Church. And they agreed that she would send one boy at time. So, she sent the first one to the church to have a word with the pastor. When he arrived, the pastor started by asking, "Son, where is God?" The boy was startled by the question. He looked at the pastor and then he took off running. When he arrived home, out of breath, he said to his brother, "Guess what? God is missing and they are blaming us!"

My point here is, how do we introduce God to people, especially when we think they know who God is?

In Exodus 20:3-4, we see God warning his people by saying, "You shall have no other gods before me," and "You shall not make idols" yet that did not deter them. ignorantly they have continued worshipping man-made gods; mocking the name the living God and despising God's messengers. (Jer 7: 25-26, Acts 7:51-52).

St. Paul is one of God messengers who faced all types of challenges as he continued proclaiming the Gospel of the risen Christ. But full of God's grace he never gave up because he knew that God is able to change peoples lives.

This is to say that the culture that rejects God and believe in freedom without God will continued to make the work of God difficult. But the Good News is, the Word of God that proceeds from the mouth of God will not return in void. (Isaiah 55:11).

If you read the previous verses of Acts 17 you will notice that Paul was helped by some believers to escaped from Thessalonica and Berea; where some jealous Jews who were against Paul's preaching had started rioting in the city, accusing Paul and Silas of "causing trouble all over the world," [17:5-6b].

When Paul escaped to Athens he left Silas and Timothy behind in Berea. Acts 17:16 tells us while he was waiting for them, he toured the city of Athens. When he was touring Paul was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. In that state of distress, he saw an inscription that reads, "*to an Unknown*

God;” That gave him a starting point. Determined to proclaim this unknown God to the people, Paul made an attempted to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, both in the temples and in the marketplace. This caused him to be brought before Areopagus, the highest court of the city to explain him.

Here St. Paul found himself being accused of talking about the unknown God and advocating for foreign gods. The accusers said that Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus' resurrection. Thus, bringing strange ideas to the Athens.

These allegations angered bothered the Athens, for they were more familiar with their man-made gods whom they could see and touch. It is believed that there were about 30,000 gods in Athens. One of the pagan writers by the name Petronius say that "It was easier to find a god in Athens than a man!"

This the extreme number of idols prompted Paul to preach the Gospel to the Athens. Full of holy zeal, Paul addressed them by saying; v22-23"*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." Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.*"

He described this unknown God, as the God of all creation, and the giver of life; the only God who is in control and as the God who is within us. This God created human beings and marked out their appointed times in history and place them in a particular land for with purpose. v27 tells us that "*God did this so that men[and women of course] would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us.*" and in v28 he adds, "*For in him we live and move and have our being.*" v29"*Therefore 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 human design and skills.*".

Perhaps you are wondering what has Paul's teaches has to do with us at this time and age?

While, in many ways, the Word of God has lost value in many peoples' lives. Even though we use the money inscribed with, "in God we Trust." we have not put our trust in God, instead we've put our trust in money, in ourselves, in our political parties, in our high positions and, in human knowledge. All these could be our modern idols.

We've replaced God's wisdom with human wisdom, and pride ourselves as intellectuals who does not need to be told which God to worship or that there is one way to eternal life.

Anyone who talks about God is met with sentiments like, “you can't prove that God exists, or Is God even real? And if he is, why does he allow bad things like coronavirus and other calamities to happen to us?”
There is no god.

Whereas all these questions are relevant to ask, we must understand there are no easy answers; for nobody can understand the mind of God, (1 Cor 2:11b). Yet that does not mean that God doesn't exist. Perhaps the question we should ask ourselves today is, where do we see God or how do we experience God in our lives today? Especially during this time of global pandemic or I should say global pandemics? And how have we labeled the God we worship? when people look at us or hear us talk, do they see or hear any sign of God whom might interest them?

My prayer for each one of us is that we may continue encouraging each other the best way we can. And remind each other that the God we worship is still in control. And no matter what he will see us through all these challenges.

I also pray that we may continue listening to the Pauls of our times - our scientists and health care professionals and ignore those who are promising disaster by playing roles that does not belong to them.

People of God, we must be wise, as the word of God reminds us in Proverbs 19:8 that "*He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers!*"

Where there is lack of God's wisdom ignorance prevails and brings nothing but disaster. And as Fredrick Douglass put it, "Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, where any one class is made to feel that society is an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe."

However, the good news is, in past God overlooked peoples' ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. I believe God is calling us today too; for we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Rom 3:23). God is also calling us as believers to stand between the gap and intercede for our nation and the rest of the world.

For this is the time we need God's divine intervention than ever.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14, God's promised "*If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I hear from heaven will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*" Does this include coronavirus? Yes, God is going to do it, and all will be well with us. **Amen.**