

Idol Reflections Notes on Acts 17:16-30 Paul in Athens June 5, 2011

Where Paul is

- Athens – not necessarily plan to preach
- Waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him
- Athens – an intellectual center; cultural center
- What are the cities that we consider to be the center of things?

What Paul did

- He didn't plan to preach, but what he saw distressed him
- He saw a city of idols, including unknown god idol
- Covering all their bases? Similar to someone who wears a cross, has a Buddha statue/shrine in their home and other sacred symbols – searching for the divine
- Did seeing all of the idols compel him to share the good news of Jesus and his resurrection?

What Paul did

- He began to talk to the people in the places that they found themselves
- First, to the synagogue to talk to the Jews and the God-fearers
- Second, to the marketplace, the center of the city activity to talk to people passing by
- Third, to the philosophers, the center of thought

A people who search

- Paul recognizes their quest for the divine
- People feel something is missing, but may not know what it is – God, meaning, joy, fame, money – some things don't seem to fill that missing part of you
- Easy to judge those who search – as someone who dabbles in a bit of everything
- Yet, there's a desire their to meet God; to find God
- Book/movie – *Eat, Pray, Love* – main character searching for self, for divine; travels far
- Not whether place trust in something, but who place trust in (narrative podcast)
- Example of 4 men who can't see and find an elephant, but don't agree on what they've found because each has "found" a different part and thinks that's the truth
- Tail – rope; ear – fan; trunk – hose; leg -- tree

How is Jesus introduced to those who search?

- Do we share the Jesus that looks like us; that we want Jesus to be or do we share the Jesus that we read about in scripture, that we know Jesus to be? A Jesus that not only loves us, but challenges us
- Paul sees their statue to the unknown god and makes the huge claim that he knows that God

Where to search

- Sometimes we search so far away for the divine
- Paul tells the people of Athens about why God did what he did so that the people would come to know the God who created all things and would search and “perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us.”
- Isn’t that the case? We go looking for God or meaning in other things and in far away places when God is actually not far away from us at all.
- In fact, God is as close as the table before us – our groping can take us to meet God through the very blessings of Christ, given to us in the breaking of the bread and the pouring of the wine
- A God who is near, not a faraway god, but a God who is near to us and welcomes all to the table. (image/idea – Jenny Williams, “Idol Behaviors”)

Helpful Resources:

- “American Idols,” Melissa Bane Sevier on textweek.com
- “Idol Behaviors,” Jenny Williams on textweek.com
- Matt Skinner on workingpreacher.org
- Narrative podcast
- The Message of Acts, John R. W. Stott