

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Still haven't found what you're looking for?

God is closer than you think.

Scripture: Act 17:16-31

Rev. Steve Filyk

May 15 2022

Opening Hymn: All Creatures of Our God and King [433]

Choruses: Open the eyes of my heart Lord (Smith), You are my king (Amazing Love)

Closing Hymn: Just as I am, without one plea

If you were a foreigner

Walking our city streets

what would you say that we Canadians valued?

If you were in Toronto

And ended up at the intersection of Yonge and Dundas

What would you say that we valued? [SHOW SLIDE]

You might guess that we are a society of shoppers.

That we are a people who find fulfillment

In acquiring more stuff.

If you were in Vancouver

And ended at Roger's Arena

at hockey or a soccer game

What would you say that we valued? [SHOW SLIDE]

You might guess that we are a society of sports enthusiasts.

That we are a people who find fulfillment

In being entertained.

If you were in Richmond

And ended up driving down No. 5 Road

A road marked by mosques and temples and churches

What would you say that we valued? [SHOW SLIDE]

You might guess that we are a society

That is very religious.

That we are a people who find fulfilment

In religious rituals and spiritual practises.

Maybe we are all of these things?

A society of consumers.

A society of fans.

A society of religious devotees.

Of course most of us know

That while there is some joy to be found
 In watching the home team win
 Or purchasing a new pair of sneakers
 Or attending a worship service

There are deep longings in our souls
 That often remain unfulfilled.

Don't believe me?

Next time you hear about the rock band U2 playing in some city,
 See if you can find a video clip of their concert.

Just notice how many people join in on the chorus
 Of their best-known anthem, singing

"But I still haven't found what I'm looking for." [SHOW IMAGE]
 But I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

PAUSE

Today we continue with the Apostle Paul
 On his second missionary journey.

Last week Paul and Silas were escorted out of Philippi
 After being punished for releasing
 A slave-girl from her spiritual bondage.

Today Paul is in Athens.
 He was sent on from Berea
 Ahead of Timothy and Silas
 After some of his opponents
 Made trouble for him in that city.

As his custom
 Paul heads nearest synagogue
 To talk to his people about Jesus.

Later in the marketplace, he gets into a debate
 With some Greek philosophers
 Which wins him an invitation to share
 His views about religion in the Areopagus.

What you may know is that in Paul's time
 "Athens retained fame as a center of philosophy,
 although some other cities,
 such as Alexandria and Tarsus, had surpassed it."ⁱ

What you probably **don't know** is that
 The Areopagus was "Athens' aristocratic city council
 and leading court."ⁱⁱ

Paul has an opportunity to speak
 to the movers and shakers in Athens.

He has the opportunity to tell them the Good News
 He has discovered in Jesus Christ.

In this short extract of his sermon
 That was read for us this morning
 Paul lays some important groundwork before getting
 To the heart of his argument.

He begins by pointing out what they already know:
 The place is extraordinarily religious.

Unlike the Jewish world of monotheism,
 The Greeks embraced a whole pantheon of divinity.
 And Athens was filled with Temples and altars
 Dedicated to a whole host of Gods.

Paul begins by pointing out what they already know
 That the place is extraordinarily religious.

But Paul intuits that despite this fact
 That despite their profound religiosity,
 many haven't found fulfillment in this.

This can be gleaned from the fact
 That while there are myriads of gods to serve and follow,
 Some have made temples and alters to a god
 That is unknown. [SHOW PICTURE]

Maybe this unknown God will offer them fulfillment.

This can be gleaned from the peoples' other profound fascination.
 Their passion for new ideas:
 how they spend so much time
 Talking about the latest ideas
 Expresses this yearning.

Maybe dissecting and discussing with fill that
 Deep longing in their souls.

These people were religious,
 And yet at a deeper level

They didn't find what they had been raised on
 or what was popularly available
 was meeting their deepest needs.

Paul intuits this.

He sees this.

But he does instantly jump to Jesus
 As the one who will calm their restlessness hearts.

He begins by building a bridge
 From the world they already know.

When Paul critiques the idolatry of Athens
 noting that "The God who made the world
 and everything in it
 is the Lord of heaven and earth
 and does not live in temples built by human hands."

The Epicureans would be nodding their head in agreement

When Paul adds a quote from the Cilician poet Aratus
 Saying "in him we live and move and have our being."
 As a word against venerating fabricated idols,
 The Stoics would be smiling in turn.

If Paul were to address us today,
 He might tell us things we already know.
 That if life was found in acquiring more
 we should already be happy.

If purpose was found in entertainment
 Then we would be the most actualised people on earth.

That if joy acquired by listening to sermons
 Or writing checks to charities
 Then we shouldn't be miserable.

If Paul said those things
 We might also be nodding our heads
 And smiling in agreement.

We know where life isn't found.
 We've tried that already.

But this is where things change,
 Paul doesn't simply join us in our diagnosis of the problem,
 But presents us with a solution to our dis-ease.

Paul points us to Jesus and the resurrection.

The reason God doesn't need our sacrifices
 Isn't because God is distant or uninterested as believed the Epicureans.
 The reason God doesn't need our sacrifices
 Is because God made those very things.

The reason we shouldn't focus on idols
 Isn't because God is in everything, as believed the Stoics,
 But because God's fingerprints should take us past creation
 Towards the Creator of All.

Paul tells the crowd gathered that while they have good impulses
 That they are misdirected.
 Paul encourages them that what they are still looking for
 Can actually be found.

God is personal AND knowable,
 And that this has been demonstrated in Jesus' resurrection.

Our restless hearts won't be calmed
 By buying more
 Or seeing more
 Or even giving more.

Our restless hearts will find rest
 In an encounter with the risen Jesus.

Now to this point some had probably given Paul
 the benefit of the doubt.

But resurrection is for many a bridge too far.
 In a 5th century play by Aeschylus,
 Apollo inaugurates the court of the Aeropagus
 The very place where Paul was standing
 Saying:

"When a man dies,
 and his blood is spilled on the ground,
 there is no resurrection."ⁱⁱⁱ

We are told that "When they heard about the resurrection of the dead,
 some of them sneered, but others said,
 "We want to hear you again on this subject."

And so Paul left the council."
 But...
 But....

Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed.

Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus,
also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.”^{iv}

Most of us can agree where life is not to be found.

But are we willing to take a chance that there is an answer, a solution
And that this just might be found in Jesus?

Pierre de Fermat was a French lawyer

and government official most remembered for his work in number theory
and in particular for his Last Theorem.

Fermat’s last theorem [is that]

the statement that there are no natural numbers (1, 2, 3,...)
x, y, and z such that $x^n + y^n = z^n$, in which n is a natural number greater than 2.

For example, if $n = 3$,

Fermat’s last theorem states that no natural numbers x, y, and z exist
such that $x^3 + y^3 = z^3$
(i.e., the sum of two cubes is not a cube). [SHOW PICTURE]

The proposition was first stated as a theorem by Pierre de Fermat around 1637
in the margin of a copy of Arithmetica;

Fermat added that he had a proof that was too large to fit in the margin.

This problem was worked on for years, decades, even centuries.

If you were a mathematician who spend twenty years on this problem
To no avail,

You might be convinced that there was no solution.

And yet...

The English mathematician Andrew Wiles...

with help from his former student Richard Taylor...

devised a proof of Fermat’s last theorem,

which was published in 1995 in the journal Annals of Mathematics.^v

Paul offers Athens and us

A solution to our problems.

Are you willing to consider it?

ⁱ *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* 1912.

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ NT Wright *Acts for Everyone: Part 2* 93

^{iv} Acts 16:32-34 NIV

^v See "Fermat’s last theorem | Definition, Example, & Facts." Encyclopedia Britannica, 13 May. 2022, www.britannica.com/science/Fermats-last-theorem And Contributors to Wikimedia projects. "Fermat's Last Theorem - Wikipedia." 11 May. 2022, en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Fermat%27s_Last_Theorem&oldid=1087312754.