

## Seeing Jesus

Acts 17:22-31 & John 14.15-21

*Easter 6 - May 2020*

### Acts 17:22-31 (ESV)

<sup>22</sup> So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. <sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, <sup>28</sup> 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."

<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup> 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."

### John 14.15-21 (ESV)

#### *Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit*

<sup>15</sup> "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, <sup>17</sup> even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

<sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

#### Message

Have you seen the Lord?

### **Introduction:**

Three weeks ago on the Third Sunday of Easter we read the story of two people meeting Jesus on the road to Emmaus. In a talk as you walk bible study their hearts burned and when later sharing a meal they recognized Jesus as the man they met on the road and had been talking with.

I spoke about how that story sets us up to expect experiencing Jesus in study of God's word in the scriptures and in doing what he told us to do, in that case to take, bless, break and share bread in memory of him.

Today I want to continue opening scriptures to hear what they say about seeing Jesus. The clear message is that as Jesus is alive and active, he may be seen and recognized by those who know how to look. Knowing how and where to look is very important.

We are going to join St Paul in Athens talking about where not to look for God and then move back in time to hear Jesus as he points to the place where he -Jesus- can be seen.

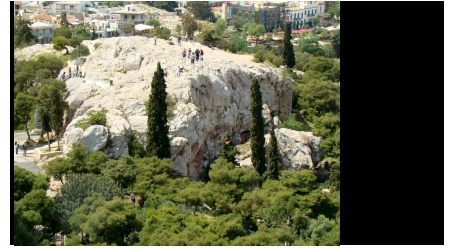
### **Text A**

So we start in Athens in the year 51 during Paul's first missionary journey West. He is geographically in Europe and learning how to reach Pagan Gentiles with the story of a Jewish Messiah as the crucified, resurrected and ascended Son of God and Saviour of the World. This was not going to be easy!

So after some local on-the-ground research he goes to a special place where people went to present new ideas and discuss philosophy - perhaps a bit like TED Talks of his day?

The place is known in Greek as the Areopagus and sometimes in English as 'Mars Hill'. It's a rough outcrop of limestone half way up the hill to the majestic Acropolis site that still overlooks Athens today.

Here is a picture of it today with a few people on it and without buildings of ancient times.



I was very pleased to get there last October so I have to show you some of my pictures!

These are the only steps to the top of the rock so I could literally walk in the footsteps of St Paul.



To the right of these steps is a bronze plaque with the text we heard read today from Acts 17 in modern Greek.

It's seen here flanked by two sweaty tourists!

In English it's less than 270 words -so a short sermon- at just 15% the length of this one!



So picture the scene in AD 51 when some of the smartest minds in Athens are on hand to hear the latest from a visiting Jew. What is he going to say in the few minutes he has before they loose interest?

As I stood on the Areopagus last year it occurred to me that Paul actually started with a light touch of humour. Yes, Paul may have set out tickle his audience and build some rapport before landing his challenge.



Paul is standing on a rock outcrop with a view upwards and a view downwards.

Why do I say this?

If you look upwards towards the Acropolis -which was the premier site for temples of all dedications featuring the greatest Greek temple of all in the middle known today as the Parthenon.



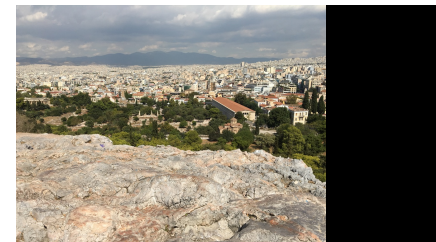


Here are the ruins of that center piece temple to Athena known as the 'Parthenon' undergoing restoration:



So the skyline above where Paul is standing is full of temples.

But if you then look downwards to one side from the Aeropagus you behold the heart of Ancient Athens known as the 'Agora'.



A few of its ancient temples and shrines remain there today. It was then also packed with places of worship and veneration.

So with all this in view Paul begins his address:

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious."

With awesomely constructed temples above and below, Paul was standing on a piece of rough limestone reading the architecture of Athens and forming a spiritual profile of the city.

He has seen more than the grand temples. There was more to register in the streets and public places of the city and he points to it:

<sup>23</sup> ... as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.'

This picture shows an example of such a altar to an unknown God as recovered by archeology



So there's the opening tickle: With temples and shrines everywhere -above and below- Paul discerns the nagging awareness that there was a god beyond all those living in temples and called upon in shrines – an as yet unknown god.

Paul's message in short: You are looking for God but you look in the wrong places.

...I proclaim to you.<sup>24</sup>

- The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,
- <sup>25</sup> nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything,
- since he himself gives life and breath to all mankind and everything.

- <sup>29</sup>Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, a material image formed by the art and imagination of man.

To make this really simple: Don't look for the creator God in the creations of people.

The most amazing architecture, the most sublime music, the most arresting art will not reveal the living God to you. These things are not bad, but they are not God.

Many Christians and churches have forgotten this whether it's organs, rock bands, stage acts or liturgy. This in part why I don't want church to be like a concert.

So if you are looking for the living Jesus, don't go to anything that people have made or think a certain place is where you will find him. All those classical temples bring nothing!

### **Text B**

So while Paul had to begin the conversation about seeing God by dismantling the infrastructure of man-made religion, Jesus came at the same question 20 years beforehand referring it to himself and his imminent departure.

Around AD 30 or AD 33 he was there with his disciples and preparing to leave. He promised them that the Holy Spirit -expressing the love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father- would come as another 'Helper' to be present for ever, the Spirit of truth.

Then come some words on our topic of seeing and not seeing God.

"The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You do know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

This is Jesus talking of what was to come.

So the world of humanity that lives according to:

- the ways of the world
- the mind and appetites of the flesh
- the law of the jungle
- might is right
- money as god
- and winner takes all

simply cannot see the Spirit of truth that will take Jesus' place among his friends as another Helper. The world cannot recognize the Spirit.

In contrast says Jesus:

"You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."

So if the world thinks of God at all, he is sought in temples and associated with holy places but Jesus puts a spin on that: He dwells not in temples made by human hands but he dwells in you.

**Q** OK Francis, that sounds nice, but how do we get to see that?  
How can we see God present within us and in our lives?

Now because this is John's Gospel you have to hear Jesus repeat the promise again in other words before I can give Jesus' answer to that question:

<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup>Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

So again we are told, The world -ie: unredeemed humanity adrift from God- will not see Jesus and at best consider him past history, but his true disciples will see him.

The tension is building!

**Qi** How will we be able to see you and know that you are alive and Father and the Son are truly One?

**A** The answer comes in verse 21: [NRSV]

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

*John 14.21*

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

For clarity, let's turn that statement around without changing its meaning. Jesus says: "I will reveal myself to and love those who hold my commandments and love me through obeying them."

There it is: Those who hear Jesus and obey him will see him.

At this point I want to jump through your screen and grab you. Do you really get that?

This is how Jesus makes himself visible. Hold his words, obey them and you will see him.

I'll give 2 typical examples of this from my experience.

#### Illustration A.

20 years ago I was sitting in an inter-church meeting and there was an appeal for people to loan funds in support of a Christian Youth Camp. Sitting there I felt I should loan \$1000. So I did that. I felt this as God's leading.

A few days later Nat came home from school with a letter. Apparently, the school parent's association had us enrolled in the parent's monthly lottery draw. How bizarre? I thought. I read on: this month we had won the prize of \$1000. At that moment I knew. This was the Lord teaching me obedience and grace. The numbers bore witness and showed his hand. This involves numbers and timing.

#### Illustration B.

Last year July I was at the Life-Stream event that served as our Church Summer Camp. It was in Belgium during a biblical heat wave. One day I heard the call for volunteers to clean the toilets. I was not committed that afternoon -as I usually was- and felt that prompt of the Spirit, that little nudge that says, "Listen, Francis listen!" So I put up my hand to volunteer and join Kris Pol's team of toilet cleaners.

It was hot, it was sticky, it involved lots of spiders and a bit of muck. But something significant happened there. Someone I did not know beyond his name needed to see a church pastor cleaning toilets. It made a big impact on him and spoke into his life. That showed me Jesus at work in my life directing me to where he wanted me. That was a glorious experience and God's love shone through.

These were specific calls to act but often its more like facing something and hearing one of Jesus' many commands from scripture which are all capped with the great command to love one another as I have loved you. When a command of the Lord pops up in your mind it's probably the Spirit of Truth inviting you, advocating for Jesus, reminding that: 'Yes, this is what we do'. The response in faith is what Jesus then inhabits.

Friends, this is the adventure of being a temple of the Holy Spirit living in faithful obedience to then see Jesus at work. It is very precious.

God does not live in things made by human hands. God is not to be associated with human creativity. Rather, the Risen Ascended Jesus indwells the faithful obedience of his disciples and friends.

And it gets better! The world can recognize God in this too, even if only vaguely.

The world has a problem with those who claim: "We have God." or "Jesus is with us alone."

Yet, the world can recognize something of God when his people live in costly obedience.

Got it?