

## Angela's Sunday Ramblings 5

The readings for this week. **Acts 17 v 22 -31. John 14 v 15 - 21.**

In the Acts reading this week we find St Paul is in Athens with the aim of telling the citizens of that city about Jesus. His plan was not to just go to the chosen few but to the people and places as diverse as Jews in the synagogue and those gathered in the market place.

However, St Paul, like many good preachers that have come after him, did his stuff beforehand. He gathered as much information as possible regarding the people and places he was planning to visit. He knew for instance the Greeks reputation for debating, and that they prided themselves as being the most informed philosophers of their age. They were open to any new ideas and any new theories of science and society. In fact sitting around and talking was about the only thing many of them did do.

Like a tourist of today he saw their buildings and statues which also included their idols and altars to the various gods they worshiped. Non must be forgotten even to the point of included an altar "To an unknown god".

For Paul this was perfect for he used that altar to tell the people of Athens about the one true God. So the unknown god became known.

People who have since been noted for their missionary zeal, such the Wesley brothers, William Booth and others, I think took much from St Paul's example. Know your audience is a key maxim for those in the training for any who wish to embark on mission. On a course I once attended, the lecturer spoke of a missionary of the past who said "If you haven't learnt the indigenous language in a month then go home".

I am often reminded of that when I first started work as part of the 'Industrial Mission Association'. We were taught that we should know the place and culture of where we were working. Hence when I worked on a dockyard and with long-distance lorry drivers I knew all about the stresses and strains of logistics even to the point of how much tyres cost. Whether I will ever know as much about Herdwick and Swalesdale sheep and farming, that is another matter.

Now we are discovering a new culture. For on the whole most of us have been isolated for the last six weeks within the territory of our houses and gardens. There have been of course the chats on the telephone, Skype and Zoom whilst trying to keep up as much as possible with family and friends. Never-the-less we have been physically separated from the rest of the world.

As well as the isolated I also know there are countless people who have spent their time helping other who can't go out. This is by doing shopping, taking cooked food, caring for other's needs, nursing, and supporting others. Many have been working from home and some families have found difficulty in balancing teaching the children and doing their own work at home. Surprisingly the time and space has been at a premium.

A lot; like me who have been forced into a stricter isolation and have been busying themselves by "doing the garden". I think I have done so much gardening I am even feeling a bit fed up of it. I want a change. I did have a bit of a change - I decorated my dining room. A task I have wanted to do for ages, and I have also started sorting out my filling cabinets. The last job was far less satisfying than I had hoped and I am only a short way into it. I will wait for an even rainier day before I go back to it I think!

What we are experiencing is so very new and very different, we can't even go to church. Yet like St Paul God still calls us to take every opportunity to tell of his love. The problem is how.? We must learn a new language and that is easier said than done. The church is thankfully leaning new methods of communication which is aiming to say we are still here we and so is God. We have not gone away. Services have been broadcast to bring people comfort and assurance. However there are many people who do not have all the high tech or even know how to use it, and that is more of a challenge. So we must be inventive in our new culture. We must not give up trying to do our best in bringing God to others in anyway possible.

Another thought that came out of the reading for me was "What is my unknown God? What have I missed or what do I try to hang on to at all costs?"

I certainly know for me it is life itself that is my unknown God. I have discovered in me a fear of catching the virus, of being ill and the chance of dying. One friend said to me "don't worry about it you will just be dead so you wont know." Yet as I agreed with another friend we want to live longer as we feel we still have much to do.

We each may have found something we might not have even thought of which is the centre of our lives. We may only just discovered its importance, like seeing a loved one, talking to a friend, or even eating a certain food.

It does not necessarily have to be something that is a luxury but a real necessity. Many will have feared for their employment. The loss of a job will be the loss of the ability to pay the

mortgage, pay the rent this month, or pay for food to feed the family. These are real problems with no easy solutions.

For others it may be a loss or delayed treatment at hospital and how will that affect my future health. Trivial as it may seem, it may even be a cancelation of a holiday which has been planned and will we get money refunded?

The Greeks feared that if they forgot a god that god will get angry and punishment will come upon them. In these uncertain times many of us fear the future and what will happen next? What will happen to the economy, our society when all this gets back to some sort of normality? Many also ask the questions regarding creation that has had a chance to heal a little and will we go back into our old ways without thinking. Might we in fact just stop and consider what are we doing? Or we may simply ask “When we be able to hug those we love.?”

All these are unanswered questions, because we just don't know. The future is open to all possibilities both great and small. It will undoubtedly be small steps but even great things start with just small steps.

The Christian church started with just a few people preaching and teaching about the love of God. The reading from John's gospel centres on love. Love from God, love for one another, and a love in God. Jesus promises that He will never leave us comfortless. He will be with us. That promise I believe is still as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago.

There will be a way forward but we must continue to faithfully bare one another's burdens and pray for each other. We must watch for signs of light and hope. As St Paul says in Roman's chap 8 v 35 “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?”, and in verse 37 “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”.

St Paul kept faith even to the end he never gave up reaching for the signs of the love of God no matter what situation he was in. We in faith must do the same with the help of God.

God bless,

From Angela

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