

Sermon Series: “Sharing the Good News—A Way of Life”—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—3/8/2009
Title: “Cross-Cultural Reaching Out”
Text: Acts 17:16-34
Intro.: *Ills.: Questionable Community*
Theme: Often we find ourselves out of step and out-of-sync with our world because we hunker down in our monastic way of Christian living, when God call us to get out of the fort and into the world with the Good News.

Warning – viewer discretion advised (as you venture out into the world) (Acts 17:16-21)

- Stressed by what you see and run across (16-17)
- 1. Paul with an idol altar on every corner like gas stations – one hedging bet “*to the unknown god*” (vs. 23)
- 2. Attitudes, priorities, habits, conduct that has not been redeemed might stretch you and me
- Even though you are ready for them, they might not be ready for you (18-19)
- 1. Paul was viewed as a rabble, outsider, freak, a **Hoosier** –derogatory and condescending on idiocy of Christ faith
- 2. *But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence. 1 Peter 3:15*
- Be careful not to major in the minors (*spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new vs 21*)
- 1. *Don't let people waste time in endless speculation over myths and spiritual pedigrees, for these things only cause arguments; they don't help people live a life of faith in God. 1 Timothy 1:4 (NLT)*

Be willing to make allowances for God's wider family (Acts 17:22-27)

- Accepting and promoting your common roots (22--“*I see that in every way you are very religious*”)
- 1. Often Christians are portrayed as self-righteous, hermits who only venture out to get a “scalp” or push a “cause”
 - a. **Ills.: Us and Them**
- 2. Celebrate connection to neighbor by commending good they do, parenting or sportmanship or community service
- Risking the first step of a relationship (vss. 23-24)
- 1. It is easy for us to become independent and isolated from each other in our communities
 - a. Our Christian faith is one which encourages us to reach out beyond ourselves to care for our neighbor
- 2. More than random acts of kindness, intentional about our relationships to look for opportunities to share the word
 - a. *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:5-6*
- Engaging in the dialogue of your community over what is our purpose
- 1. Paul clearly outlined why people live and are placed in the communities, countries, and conditions by God (25-27)
- 2. Why do you exist? What do you exist for? Does it tie into your faith in Jesus? Could you explain it, if asked?

Find the common ground to witness to and impact your neighbor for Jesus (Acts 17: 28-31)

- **Connect the dots** for them to Jesus
- 1. Know your neighbors' life and interests well enough so that your **witness has relevancy and credibility**
 - a. Paul even used a current writer/poet to draw the connection to the truths of the Bible (28)
 - b. Involved enough in activities/culture of our friends/neighbors to make application but not lose perspective
- 2. **Discerning the difference** between secular philosophies and Christian teaching--point the way to real life (29)
- **Share the hope** that you have found in a “living Jesus”
- 1. *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3: 15*

Learn to give love to your world without an expectation (Acts 17:32-34)

- Thick skinned and soft hearted
- 1. Paul was jeered and cheered at the same time for wanting nothing than the best for his “neighbor” (vss. 32-33)
- 2. **Ills.: Do the Right Thing, Anyway**
- Following Paul's example
- 1. Be willing to reach and love as far and as much as it takes so that you might reach some for Jesus (vs. 34)
- 2. *I have become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some. 1 Corinthians 9:22*

Questionable Community

Grove Street was lined with lovely mature trees, manicured lawns, and three churches—all right next to each other. The three churches were each built in different styles and shapes, but they each posted a sign out front, proudly displaying the name of the church. The three churches were named First Community Church, Second Community Church, and Third Community Church. One day the pastors of these three houses of worship all happened to meet on the sidewalk in front of their churches. Said one pastor to the others, "Maybe we need to define what we mean by *community*." **Adapted by Drew Zahn from an original cartoon by Ed Koehler, The Best Cartoons from Leadership Journal, Volume 1 (Broadman & Hol**

Us or Them

My neighbor's son, Robert, seemed young to be an usher at a wedding, but he was quickly coached in wedding protocol. A veteran usher instructed Robert to ask the person he was escorting, "Are you a guest of the bride or groom?" to know where to seat them. Imagine our surprise when we heard Robert ask, as he graciously offered his arm to the first arrival, "Madam, are you one of us or them?" **Richard Blake, San Luis Obispo, California. "Rolling Down the Aisle," Christian Reader**

Do the Right thing, Anyway

- People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.
- If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. Be kind anyway.
- If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.
- The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Be good anyway.
- Honesty and frankness will make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.
- What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.
- People need help but may attack you if you try to help them. Help them anyway.
- In the final analysis, it is between you and God. It was never between you and them anyway.

Kent M. Keith, "The Paradoxical Commandments," from The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council (Cambridge)

Acts 17: 16-34

¹⁶Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols. ¹⁷So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing *Gentiles*, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present. ¹⁸And also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him. Some were saying, "What would this idle babbler wish to say?" Others, "He seems to be a proclaimer of strange deities,"—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming? ²⁰"For you are bringing some strange things to our ears; so we want to know what these things mean." ²¹(Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new.)

²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³For 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. ²⁴"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 hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

²⁹"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 man's design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead."

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." ³³At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴A few men 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. [NIV]