

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 21, 2017
Acts 17:22-31
The God Who Acts from Creation to Judgment
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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

The apostle Paul was in one of the great cities of the world. Gathered on a rock outcropping near the Acropolis called Mars Hill, or in Greek, Areopagus, the Stoics and Epicureans in Athens had gathered to discuss current philosophies. They were intrigued by the “strange ideas” Paul presented. Those strange ideas were the Word of God. To this day Paul’s words appear on a plaque on the side of the Areopagus.

The apostle to the Gentiles took this opportunity to proclaim **The God Who Acts from Creation to Judgment**. He created men so they would seek and find him. He will judge the world with justice by Christ.

This group of men took on the name of their meeting place. The apostle addressed the Areopagus directly and respectfully. Unlike so many today unwilling to listen to things they do not know or agree with, these philosophers listened. More about that later.

Paul played to their natural knowledge of God so evident in all the “objects of worship” scattered around the city. They were very religious, literally, superstitious. Today they would claim to be spiritual. Even with all the idols they had created to live in handmade temples to whom they brought food and drink and women, they still sensed “an unknown God.” They knew in their hearts he is real but did not know his name or his works

So, Paul began literally at the beginning to reveal the name and works of the one true God. People often ask whether a belief in Biblical creation is important. The answer is, of course. Everything stretches out from there all the way to the final judgment. “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples build by hands. And he is not served by human hands as if he needed anything. Because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”

The true God is not some idol whose entire being can be held in a temple. What does the true God need from me to exist when he is the one who gives me everything I need to exist? Paul was telling them to forget these gods of precious metals and stone and believe in the living God who created the world and everything in it. He rules it and nothing else.

God created all nations with one blood. He determined where we were born and live and how long we live. God rules over us all for one purpose. All people know God exists. God had fallen man retain that natural knowledge so we would seek to find and perhaps discover the one who made us and takes care of us.

We cannot discover him without the revelation of his name and work. That is what Paul was doing and what we do as we tell others about Christ. We tell them individually. We tell them collectively through our missionaries who take Christ to the nations. We proclaim that “unknown God” so others can tear down their altars to it, and worship the Creator. God is not far away from us. There is no need to continue to stumble around as if in the dark looking for him, and maybe accidentally coming across the true God. He is before us revealed clearly in the Word of God, especially the gospel of our forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ.

Creation is important because it is the first step toward judgment. Men need to seek and find the true God and know him in faith to be able to stand secure in the Last Day. Then, he will judge the world with justice in Christ.

A belief in Creation means a belief that we are his offspring. We are from him. Even the Greek poet Aratus, though he did not know who he was talking about said, “We are his offspring.” Paul showed them whose offspring they were. In that sense, all people are the children of God since he made us all.

For centuries before God sent the Savior, he was patient with those nations who ignorantly worshiped false gods as he shared with them the Promise of the Savior through his people. Now, after he had fulfilled that Promise in Christ, he directs “all people everywhere to repent.” God has revealed to all nations his Son and his redemption.

Now is the time for all to repent daily of our sins and look to Christ whom the Father raised from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection is the proof that the Father has appointed his Son as the Judge. He will judge us in righteousness; “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” God made us, gives us life and breath, raised Jesus from the dead, and calls us to repentance, all on the path toward the time Christ judges us.

There is no “circle of life” for the world and everything in it. There is only the straight line from creation to judgment. To deny creation is to deny judgment. To deny judgment is to deny the Judge. To deny the Judge is to deny Christ and to stand condemned.

Luke tells us that when Paul mentioned the resurrection, it raised the eyebrows of the Stoics and Epicureans. As I said earlier, they weren’t like so many today. They listened. Some did sneer but others said to Paul, “We want to hear you again on that subject.” Luke adds that a few did become followers of Paul and believed. God’s Word never returns empty but accomplished his purpose to turn idol worshipers into believers who worship only him.

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead is God’s proof of Creation and its purpose. Jesus’ resurrection is proof of the commonality of all nations in blood and in sin and in justification. Jesus’ resurrection is his credential as Judge before whom all will stand either on his right in faith, or on his life in unbelief.

The apostle gives us a model of how to proclaim the true God to those who know he is real but do not know his name or what he has done for them. Simply proclaim the God who acts from Creation to Judgment in Christ. They may not erect a plaque for you on the spot, but some will rejoice with you throughout eternity. Amen. <SDG>