

St. Paul: On The Same page

05.17.14 for Easter 6a

Day One: Acts 17:16-31

¹⁶Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. (ESV)

When you're shopping, when you're walking, when you go out to eat or walk downtown for the Art Fair or to see a show, do you look around and observe signs of spiritual things? If you keep your eyes open, you might be surprised at how much you'll see.

Bumper stickers, signs, symbols, tattoos, t-shirt logos, songs on the radio, hints in advertising, on menus, even in architecture. We are surrounded by spiritual concepts and messages – and most of them are not about Jesus. Not anymore. This troubled Paul.

Paul had been wandering around in the city and seeing those same signs, and his heart

was troubled. It says “his spirit was provoked within him.” Do these things trouble you?

Is your spirit provoked when you see sexually suggestive window displays at the mall? If you pass a Buddhist or Hindu place of worship, does that make you think, or cause you to pray for the people who worship there? When you see billboards promoting greed or immorality, does it weigh on your heart?

When Paul saw such things his “spirit was provoked” but he did not complain. It says “he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews... and in the marketplace every day...”

When your heart is troubled, what does that lead you to do? You could hide out at church among those who agree with you. Or you could strike up conversations and get to know people who do not know Jesus. You could go into the marketplace as a missionary, a person who represents Jesus.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, all around me are the lost. Open my eyes, my heart, and my lips. Amen.*

Day Two: Acts 17:19-22

(The first reading continued)

¹⁹And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?"²⁰For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean."²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.²²So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. (ESV)

Most likely no one has ever invited you to give a speech about Jesus. People might not want to hear a sermon – but people who do not know Jesus are often interested in having a good conversation about what they believe, and what you believe.

I was golfing once with a fine Christian man. We saw some of his co-workers on another tee, and they waved to him. I asked him if they were his regular golf partners.

“No, I’m not comfortable golfing with them. They’re Hindu, and I just don’t see eye to eye with them,” he replied.

We are all uncomfortable sometimes with unfamiliar customs or accents. And these other men may have also had very different views not just about religion but about life, about politics, about food.

But all of those things applied to Paul, and even more. The Gentiles lived a radically different life than his. Their language, food, clothing, sexual mores, politics and faith were all offensive to a follower of Jesus. And yet, Paul went with them.

He had listened to them and learned their beliefs and values. Now he had a chance to speak with them and to share something much better. Many would reject Jesus, their Savior. But some would believe, and others would be willing to hear more.

Can you converse with someone who does not share your faith? Who in your life is most open to having that conversation?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I can talk easily about many things that interest me. Give me that kind of love for your word and your name, that it would season all my thought and speech. Amen.*

Day Three

1 Peter 3:13-22

¹³Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (ESV)

We sometimes think of boldness as being the same thing as rudeness. A bold person speaks up when we might consider it more polite to be quiet. A bold person questions, even challenges, what someone else has said when we might consider it more polite just to let disagreements pass.

What is the difference between boldness and rudeness? Peter says that we should defend our faith with gentleness and respect. It takes great boldness to defend our faith. A person must be very zealous, very passionate, to be

willing to take a chance and speak up.

It takes even more boldness to do that without shouting – without denouncing others – but with gentleness and respect.

That means listening to others – wanting to know more about what they believe. And it means responding without insults, without criticism, but still telling people the truth.

I heard two people talking about which football team was the best. They each felt strongly about their team, and they each had reasons to share. Sometimes it almost seemed as if they were insulting to one another because they spoke so frankly about one another's favorite team.

But when they were done, they still laughed together and loved each other. They loved their teams, but they loved one another more. Why is our faith sometimes so hard to talk about? Perhaps we lack love.

Prayer: *Dear Holy Spirit, fill me up with love for Jesus so that I cannot help but share it. And then give me the words to express the love he has shown for me. Amen.*

Day Four

Gospel: John 14:15-21

¹⁸"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹

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."

Can you see Jesus? Off the top of your head, your first answer would be 'no,' of course. And Jesus himself says that he will leave us and we will see him no longer. And yet... somehow "you will see me." How is that possible?

Have you ever been so close to someone that, even when you were not with them, you felt as if they were a part of everything you did? My daughter recently spent a week in Korea. While she was there she posted photos to FaceBook, along with comments about the things she saw and did. I could not have been farther away from her, and yet I still felt close, because we share the same feelings.

Those are just feelings of love. But Jesus is able to be close like that, and even much more! Jesus says that he will be IN us, and we will be IN him.

He says that he will "manifest" himself to us. That means that he will reveal himself.

Jesus does not post pictures to social media. He did something much better. He posted long descriptions of the things he did and said. And he gave us others who had seen him, who could tell us about him. He placed us in a flock, a family of believers, where we could share the love that he displayed for us.

Jesus is so close to us that he says we will receive the same life that he has. And because of him we will be in his heavenly Father.

Perhaps here is where an old saying applies well: if you don't feel close to Jesus, guess who moved?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, sometimes I feel alone. Reveal yourself to me, Lord, in your word, in my brothers and sisters in faith, and in your sacrament. Amen.*