

## Strange Things

Easter Sunday  
April 12, 2020  
Acts 17:16-21  
Matthew 28:1-10

We're going to begin our Easter Sunday sermon this year in a little bit of a different manner. We are not going to start with the gospel account of Jesus rising from the dead. Instead we're going to go to the book of Acts, the 17th chapter, where we find Paul on Mars Hill at the Areopagus. It was an area that was directly below the Acropolis. This is what Luke records about what was going on there. "Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who live there would spend their time in nothing, except telling or hearing something new." We read that when Paul came to Athens and when he went to the Areopagus and when he saw this, he was deeply troubled. Why, because all of these people were lost. What were they spending their time doing? They were gathering together in talking about nothing except what was new. In fact, it sounds like the internet back then. It was what's the latest greatest thing that's going to bring happiness, or the latest greatest truth, or the latest greatest gossip. He realized all these people are lost. They're doing a lot of talking but they're making no headway and finding the truth. And he was definitely posed with the difficult situation. How do you bring the gospel to such people? Did he cater to the great minds of the epicureans and the stoics that Luke mentions were there? In other words, did he become very intellectual and appeal to these great minds or did he try to simplify the message for the masses? After all, we read that there were many Athenians and foreigners who lived there and we're spending their time doing nothing but telling or hearing something new. Or did he maybe try to appeal to their emotions, put on a good show and get everybody revved up to love Jesus? It's no real surprise, Paul ignored all conventional wisdom. He didn't try to cater to the intellectual, he did not try to water down the message and make it simple to understand. He did not try to put on a good show and get everybody excited. No, Paul simply spoke the truth. In fact, I invite you to open your bibles to Acts chapter 17 and go to verse 24, where he begins speaking here on Mars Hill to all of these people who are lost.

What does he start with? The first thing is there is an Almighty God and He is creator of the entire universe. And since He is the Creator, that makes Him Lord or Master of both the heavens and the earth. But He's not just the creator. In the very next verse, we see that God is the sustainer. He sustains us His creation and He literally serves us. He's the one who's taking care of us it's not us serving Him. In reality, He is the one that's initiating the servanthood. He's the one who serves us and yet, as Paul continues into verse 20:6 he points out that God is the ruler. He is the one who rules all the nations. He is the one who determines the "allotted times and the boundaries," the nations or empires. And then in verses 27 through 29, he makes some comparisons. God is not a far-off God like the gods of the Greeks, who were off in their area and basically oblivious to mankind. He is not a god of stone or wood He's not the product of an artisan. How do we know that he's not made of stone or wood; that He's not the product out of the imagination of some great artist? Paul

makes the point that we are His offspring. If we are His offspring, then He is not made of wood or stone. At the same time, Paul makes the point this God; the one God, the almighty, sustaining, ruling God, lives in us and He gives us our very being. Then in verse 30, he reveals that this God is also patient. He's overlooked our ignorance as we've tried to explain Him through the multiple gods that were made of stone and wood. He makes the point that this God though He has overlooked our ignorance, He's been patient with us, but the patience is wearing thin. Because He's our King and He now tells us repent. Why do we need to repent? Now as Paul explains in the very next verse 31, because He is the judge and He has fixed a day and by a Man whom He has appointed, that judgment will take place. And He's given us an assurance of who this Man is. How is this assurance given? Because these are one Man who's been raised from the dead, and lives and reigns eternally.

Now when these intellectual Epicureans and Stoics heard this, when the masses heard this, there was quite a reaction. We read and I quote, "Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead." This is what Paul taught, he didn't cater to anybody. He just went with the truth, the resurrection of the dead. The reason why we have gathered together this morning, the Easter message. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked. This probably was the Epicureans and the Stoics, the intellectuals. 'Oh, this is so stupid,' was probably their exact reaction. It makes me think of atheists today, who will mock Christianity.

And I think of the early history of New York City. New York harbor had some rocks in it at the at the mouth to the harbor they were called Hell gate, and ships would run aground if they were not careful and would be lost there. What needed to be done is the rocks had to be removed and so dynamite was used to blow them up and get them out of the way to keep ships from running on the rocks as they tried to come into the safety of New York harbor. What's interesting is that word dynamite. We think of dynamite, it's got a lot of power, it comes from a Greek word, that is usually translated as power. It's found in Philippians 3 verse 10 where Paul writes about "the power of His resurrection." Power, it is the resurrection that should blow away all obstacles for those who find it hard to believe. Because the reality is this, over the eons of time, there is only one religious leader who rose from the dead, who's grave is empty. And for someone to mock that, or scoff at that, I mean this is a part of history. Even the Romans themselves recorded this. For someone to mock it, or scoff, is ridiculous.

And yet that's also what Paul ran into when he went with the lead line of resurrection. How we know that Jesus is the one who God has appointed? They scoffed. But that wasn't the only reaction, we also read that some said, "we will hear you again about this." They told Paul, 'you know it's kind of interesting, we'd like to hear about this some more.' Here's the scary thing. Paul's reaction to that. Paul went out from their midst; why he had spoken the truth it flatly told them this is what happened, and this is how you know Jesus is the real Savior. He rose from the dead. And when they put it off, he didn't hang around. Hebrews 4: 4-7 says "And God appoints a certain day, calling it today," saying through David so long afterward, and the words that the author had already quoted. "Today if you hear

his voice, do not harden your hearts.” See Paul looked at those people, he said God appointed a certain day in his call. Today I just gave you the word today, the truth today, but you've hardened your hearts. You won't hear Gods voice. And so, he walked on.

It is my hope and my prayer that as we look at ourselves today, we understand the concept of today. We, here in our country, have seen our mortality in the coronavirus. If you were given the opportunity to get a vaccination against it, would you get it? Or would you just say, you know I think I'm going to wait awhile and see if this all blows over. I think we all want them to give us the vaccination. Or if there was a treatment for it, and you knew this treatment works, and you had Coronavirus and the doctor said you know we got this new treatment it's working great; would you say 'you know I think I want to hold off on that a little bit? I would like to just wait a little bit more and see what the true efficacy of that is and just I want to make sure that you know this thing really works before I try it out. No, we wouldn't do that. We would say, 'give it to me, make me better.' And there were those who did that. We read, 'but some men joined him and believed.’

The resurrection. It's what Easter Sunday is all about. What happened on that Easter Sunday? Well, we know Jesus rose from the dead. But how do we know that? There were witnesses. In our gospel this morning, we read of the women who went to the tomb, found it empty, the Angel told them, “He has risen from the dead, just as He told you, now go and tell His disciples.” And as they are on the way, what happens? Jesus meets them and what does He say to them? 'greetings' or today he would just say 'hello.' And you know what? I would contend that's one of the greatest greetings ever why because Jesus acts as if it's business as usual. He had told them He was going to die, that He would rise from the dead, why would they disbelieve? So 'greetings.'

The first message we can take from it is that God's told us; why would we disbelieve? And when Jesus said 'greetings,' we read, “and they came up and took hold of His feet and worshipped Him.” Why? Because He was really alive. It points out the physicality of Christ resurrection. Pagan belief was that when you died, your spirit hovered around the earth and that people could sometimes see that spirit. But that spirits didn't have any feet because they couldn't walk. And so, they get down at His feet and this is Him. It's real. In fact, the gnostic gospels which are those gospels that the Davinci code was written about; and stuff were written well over 100 years after Jesus. In them, they say that when Jesus walked after the resurrection, he left no footprint. The gnostic gospels were claiming he didn't really rise from the dead, it was just his spirit that people saw. Jesus and those women already addressed that in our gospel this morning. They got down, they took hold of His feet and they worshipped Him. It's a true physical resurrection that Paul was speaking of.

And then we come to the three words we talked about Maundy Thursday “and God said.” We talked about three great words on Good Friday, “It is finished.” And I'd like you to consider the three great words of the Angel “He is risen.” I recently had a discussion with somebody, and they said that they were, you know, believing they would go to heaven

because the greatest message ever given to us is that Jesus died on the cross. And you know what, Christ death on the cross is a false summit. The real summit is the resurrection, because it's the resurrection of Jesus that leads us to the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. When on the last day, that leads us to another message Christ resurrection proves that He has power over death and is it real.

Consider the disciples. The women did go and tell the disciples. Peter and John ran to the tomb. We read that on the way back, Jesus met Peter and them that night he met all 10 of them. And seeing Jesus raised from the dead changed those disciples. Peter who originally denied Him, becomes the leader and he has absolutely no problem sharing the good news of Jesus. The others, who had hidden, we see them leaving Jerusalem and going throughout the world to spread this good news. If we were in our church this morning, I would point up at the stained-glass windows we have of those apostles. They all, with the exception of John, died a martyr's death. They were transformed. They went from cowards, to bold witnesses. In fact, when we look at Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, the very people who had pronounced death on Jesus, they just stand right there and say, 'we are witnesses of these things.' What things? The resurrection. Then they tell the Sanhedrin, when the Sanhedrin forbids them of speaking of the resurrection; they respond back, "we must obey God rather than man." What happened when they got beat and what was the response of these disciples? I quote, "Then they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus. You see those disciples were totally transformed. Peter who denied Jesus three times, the other nine, they all realized, Jesus rose. He's forgiven us. We're going to heaven. We will live for Him. When we start to think about that heaven, which has been won for us, it also makes us take a real hard look at who we are and who Jesus is.

I remember as a child in fifth grade, learning the song 'we are climbing Jacob's ladder' and I like that song. I was singing it at home. It was my dad who said to me, that song has got a catchy tune. It's got a good message, but it's wrong. You aren't climbing Jacob's ladder; God came down that ladder in the form of His Son. He came down, He went to the cross, He said, "It is finished," Then the Angel said "He is risen."

There is the crux of Easter Sunday, Only Jesus is the risen One and He alone is the One that can raise us up. He and He alone is the Savior. Are we going to take God's word for it? Or are we going to be like the Epicureans and the Stoics and scoff at it, and reap our reward? Will we be like the others who said you know it sounds good, but I got other stuff to do right now. It's just not that important. Maybe we need to get coronavirus in line, before it's too late. Or maybe hear the last trumpet. Will we be like those men who heard of the resurrection from Paul and they joined him, and believed, and were transformed, and lived a life before the Lord, a life of hope, life of peace, a life of joy?

In our Savior's Name, Amen

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