

The Unknown God

Acts 17.22-31

Can you name a famous Ancient Greek?

We tend to think of those involved in science, mathematics and philosophy.

My default is Pythagoras. What is he famous for? He is famous for causing me grief with his Theorem I have never looked at a right angled triangle in the same light since I first learnt about the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. I'm also waiting for the opportunity to use this theorem in every day life.

Do you know of any other Ancient Greeks?

Most of these famous men lived well before the time of Jesus. The Greeks had charted the paths of the sun, moon and planets with mathematical precision. They were sceptical of the old ways – they didn't believe that planets and moons were deities. They had developed a lack of faith in the old gods. This scepticism in the old ways gave Paul an opening to speak of the unseen creator who is moral, compassionate and has revealed himself in Jesus.

It was a challenge for Paul to tell them about God and Jesus. He knew that many people didn't believe in the old gods. He knew that to many Greeks science and mathematics were important. But still there was a feeling that someone was behind it all – the 'unknown God'. And this gave Paul the opening he needed to speak about Jesus.

He talked about having a relationship with God. Our God is not unknown but engaged in a relationship with us. Paul acknowledges that God's spirit is at work in all people. In his address Paul talks about how the relationship with God is personal and intimate and not a material one.

In the story we heard, it seems not to have been successful – at the time. But we know from his letters to Greek churches (in Ephesus, Corinth, Galatia, etc.) that these people were ready to hear the message, even if it took time and encountered a lot of scepticism.

What can we learn from Paul's example about proclaiming the gospel in the present sceptical age?

In these challenging times I get asked about my relationship with God – how do we respond in an age when the answer to any question normally starts with - hang on I'll Google it. We rely on the World Wide Web to receive our answers even questioning science because "I've seen it on the web"

We need to talk about our personal relationship with God – how we walk together with Jesus – we may not know all the answers but we have a relationship our God is not unknown but we are part of his family.

So what can we learn from this?

We shouldn't give up telling people about Jesus, even if it doesn't seem that they want to hear the good news at that time, remember we work to God's timetable not ours.

We need to find ways of telling Jesus' story that make sense in terms of what people already believe (or don't believe) today.