

To A Known God

April 27, 2008

(Easter 6 - Year A)

Acts 17: 22-31

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

As I interact and deal with people of different ages, one of the observations I have made is that some folks will say:

“You know, I consider myself to be a *spiritual* person.

However, I don't think of myself as being a very *religious* person.”

In the reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, the apostle Paul is on his journey across the Mediterranean world, spreading the message of Jesus Christ to a foreign people.

Paul journeys to ancient Athens, in Greece, the capital city of Greek learning and intellectual thought.

Paul stands in front of the Areopagus, which is like standing in front of our Supreme Court building, and Paul proclaims to the people of Athens:

“Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.

For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription:

“To an unknown god.””

If you can remember what you learned in high school about Greek mythology, the ancient Greeks had a whole host of gods that they worshiped.

The Greeks worshiped Apollo and Zeus and Ares and all these other gods and goddesses.

And as Paul goes through the city of Athens, he sees so many different altars and objects of worship to all these different gods, that Paul, with a note of sarcasm, tells them:

“Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.”

In fact, Paul sees so many different objects of religion dedicated to so many different types of gods, that Paul also sees an altar that is dedicated:

“To an *unknown* god.”

The people of Athens might say that they are spiritual, but don't happen to consider themselves to be aligned to any one religion.

Yet, Paul shows the people of Athens how extremely religious they are, in every way.

I wonder what Paul would say if he was to visit Waco:

“People of Waco, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through your city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them a giant temple with the inscription of “Floyd Casey Stadium.”

And I found soccer fields filled on Sundays with parents and children worshipping a black and white ball,

And I found Richland Mall with people buying clothes they didn't need.

And I found half-empty and half-dead churches, with the inscription over the door that said:

“To an *unknown* god.”

If we think that we are not very religious, then we are lying to ourselves. All of us are very religious in every way.

However, our religion might not be Christianity or Judaism or the worship of Greek gods.

Our religion might be worshipping our children or our grandchildren, by indulging their every whim and wish.

Our religion might be worshipping alcohol or drugs, working hard to get the next fix to medicate our pain.

Our religion might be worshipping money, worrying and scheming about how to get and keep more of it.

Our religion might be NASCAR or the Junior League or golf or scrapbooking or fantasy football or a whole host of unknown gods and goddesses that we worship.

Yes, my friends, we are extremely religious in every way.

And there are two ways to discover what religion it is that you adhere to. Those two ways are to:

1. look at your calendar and
2. to look at your checkbook and credit card statement.

First, go home and look at your calendar or your daily schedule, which you will give you a good clue as to your religion.

Do you spend a lot of time on your appearance, getting manicures and tans and hair colorings?

Or do you spend your time in daily prayer?

Do you spend a lot of time checking your email, when it is not really necessary?

Or do you spend your time in daily Bible reading and study?

Do you spend your Sundays reading the newspaper and drinking coffee?

Or do you spend your Sundays worshipping God at St. Alban's?

A quick look at our calendar or schedule will tell us how very religious we are, in every way.

Another way to determine your religion is to look at your checkbook or your credit or debit card statement.

Do you give a significant amount of your money away, to God and to other people?

Scan down the items in your checkbook and your credit and debit card statements, and you will see the objects of your worship.

In the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, after the Apostle Paul tells the people of Athens how religious they are in every way, he tells them that God does *not* live in statues or in shrines, but that God lives among us.

God lives inside each and every person, for God is not far from each one of us.

Paul then quotes an ancient Greek poem as Paul says that it is in God that "we live and move and have our being."

We can have an intimate relationship with this God by searching for and finding and knowing Jesus Christ, in whom we live and move and have our being.

Yet, in order to search for and find and know this Jesus, we must spend time with Jesus and with Jesus' people: the poor and the sick and the lonely and the oppressed.

Sometimes people will ask me:

“Jeff, how can I know God?

Or how can I have a spiritual experience with God?”

Just as you can find out your religion by looking at your calendar and your checkbook,

I believe that you will have a relationship with the living God if you will spend *time* with God and if you will give your *money* back to God to do God's work.

Re-prioritize your calendar and your schedule so that you will spend time with God and with God's people.

Pray daily, worship regularly, study the Bible, spend time with people you would normally not hang out with, come to St. Alban's to learn more about the Christian faith and life, and ask questions and more questions and more questions about God.

And that time you have religiously given to God, I guarantee you, will result in a deeper relationship with God.

Re-prioritize the way you use and spend your money.

Trust God - and give your money away, to God's Church and to God's people who need money.

And trusting God with your money will, I guarantee you, result in a deeper relationship with God.

For all of us are extremely religious.

All of us yearn to be loved and forgiven and included - not by an unknown God - but by a God whom we know - and in whom we live and move and have our being.

For it is my hope, that if the Apostle Paul was to come among us today, he would proclaim:

“People of St. Alban’s, I see how extremely religious you are in every
way.

For I found among you an altar,
An altar with the inscription:

“To a *known* God.”

AMEN.

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