

Go And Tell

It's a great time to be a Christian. Great because our world is so much like the world of the first Christians. Those who were called to "go and tell" the good news of what God is doing in Jesus Christ.

Paul shows up in the university town of Athens. It's loaded with intellectuals who can't wait to hear the next new thing.

"Who's the next Athenian Idol?"

"Tell me more about Scientology!"

The folks in Athens have gods and goddesses for every occasion. And just in case they forgot one, there's the statue to the unknown god. They've covered their bases. Our world really isn't much different.

Scripture tells us that an idol is anything that we hang our hopes on, put our trust in, look to for safety, for security, that is not God.

Like our friends in ancient Athens, we too are sophisticated, educated, rational and smart. So we naturally have plenty of our own idols: the Pentagon, my retirement plan, patriotism, and, of course, Las Vegas, to name but a few.

But we also have Oprah, a gal who struck it rich and made a living out of giving away advice and new cars, whose retirement has left millions crying "what will we do without her??"

We have flavor of the day religious beliefs.

Anything from Shirley McClain's New Age stuff to L. Ron Hubbard to the guy who did the math and decided the world ended last Saturday.

My own wife calls herself a "Buddhist Christian."

(Don't mention that to the Bishop please).

Athens, you see, has nothing over on us!

What is Paul, what are we, to say to this world of "I'm OK, you're OK?"

In the first place, it's probably important to realize that the problem is not getting people to worship.

Human beings are made to worship.

The question is, what shall we worship? Or, more to the point, whom do we worship?

Which brings us to Paul who proclaims: "The God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth, who does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as if he needed anything, since he himself gives all mortals life and breath and all things."

This is the God Paul announces.

Yet, for so many of our friends, our relatives, this God often seems to be far away from us.

And because of that feeling that God is far away, many who want to be Christians are in fact Deists: folks who believe God exists, but who also believe that once God set the whole shebang in motion, God took a vacation, leaving us to our own devices.

Being a deist has very direct consequences.

If God is far away, then we have no choice but to rely on our own common sense; to throw ourselves into this life, to compete for scarce resources, and by sheer wits and guts figure out how to survive it.

But as Meister Eckhart says, "If you feel that God is far away from you, go back to the place on the trail where you left him, and there you will find him, waiting for you."

It is not God who leaves us; it is we who leave God.

We leave God when the idols we create take the place of God. How do we find our way back on the trail? Perhaps like this.

When we trade our common sense for God's outrageous call to place all our trust in him; we are walking back to God.

When we come to believe that the Church is not just another business, and instead bet all we have on the God who pays the last guy to show up the same amount as the gal who's been there since dawn; who scatters seeds wildly about in all directions and waits to see what happens; who loves the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly; that's when we begin to sidle up to the living God.

I'm no scientist and nearly flunked high school chemistry, but I've always found science, particularly physics, to be fascinating.

Especially the physics known as quantum mechanics.

Quantum mechanics is the science of really small stuff: particles that are smaller than atoms.

A single particle can, according to the scientists, be in many places at the same time, and that is very odd. I thought only mothers could do that!

And for the longest time, scientists thought these strange properties were confined to the sub atomic world.

Except, today, science is wondering if this oddball quantum mechanics may also apply to the big world, the world you and I move around in and know so well.

Today, science is wondering if we really do know our world, if what we touch and taste and smell and hear is not what reality really is.

That maybe there are such things as parallel universes, even different versions of you and I, where every choice or decision in life, every road not taken, is fully lived out some where, some when, some how, by a different you, a different me.

And all that science got me to thinking that maybe our reality and God's reality is not defined by "down here" and "up there" but by a thin veil that separates the two, and yet weaves between the two, like gossamer.

That somehow, heaven is all wrapped up, all wrapped around, all wrapped within, the earth.

Paul says as much to those curious Athenians.

God is that "in which we live and move and have our being."

We can no more escape the God who knows us each by name; who knows the number of hairs on your head; who knit you together in your mother's womb; this God who "holds our souls in life, and will not allow our feet to slip"; we can no more escape this God than a fish can live outside of the sea.

The wind that blows across the face of this world, it is the breath of God.

It is God's breath that we are breathing; right here, right now.

Which is exactly where Jesus is with his friends today.

Helping them, helping us, to see that unless he leaves, he can't come back. Unless he goes, he cannot stay with us.

It's always that way with Jesus.

Paradox points the way home.

Jesus makes a promise today. You will not be orphaned. I will be back. I'll be back as the Holy Spirit, the very spirit of God who will never leave you.

And who does he promise but an Advocate; you may know him as your friendly neighborhood criminal defense lawyer!

So much for all of the lawyer jokes, eh?

And the criminal defense lawyer, the Advocate that Jesus sends, comes to live among us, first so that we may face our own need for repentance, and then, so that we might do what Jesus does: advocate for and defend the poor, the weak, the widow; advocate for the Reality that God is with us; advocate for a life that hangs its hopes, not on idols, but on the Living God.

The Irish, who've been in the news this week because of the visit of President Barry O' Bama, describe the Holy Spirit as an Irish Goose.

The Irish Goose is a large, honking, noisy, somewhat clumsy, brash bird.

The Holy Spirit, like the Irish goose, shakes things up; she ruffles feathers, she attracts attention.

Choose your metaphor.

Both the criminal lawyer and the goose are often large, honking, sometimes clumsy, noisy and brash, for such is the way that God enters our lives.

Notice this as well.

Jesus doesn't call his disciples to a sweet, private "me and you Jesus" moment.

He calls them instead to wash each other's feet, he calls them to follow the King who dies a criminal's death on the cross.

And what they discover, as they begin to do what Jesus does, is that the gossamer, the veil, between heaven and earth, itself begins to thin; and they, we, are able to catch glimpses of the heaven that is even now invading the earth.

Annie Dillard speaks of walking in a farm one summer morning, when quite suddenly everything went quiet, "The roosters stopped. All the things of the world—the fields and the fencing, the road, a parked orange truck, were stricken and self-conscious. A world pressed down on their surfaces, a world battered just within their surfaces, so near to emerging....I had to turn away. Holiness is a force, and it can be resisted. It was as if God had said: 'I am here, but not as you have known me.'"

Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, 133-35.

Perhaps you have known these moments too ... your long dead husband returns to you in a dream to laugh and hold you.

Sitting on the porch at dusk, a flock of birds soar, lifting your heart along for the ride. These fleeting moments of a world just waiting to be born, the brush of heaven's kiss upon our cheek.

They are holy.

They are unexpected.

And while they leave us almost as soon as they arrive, they change us; deepening who we are; opening pieces we didn't know we held.

With the Advocate living among us, we need not look to the sky for Jesus, we need not worry that God has left us to our own wits to get by.

God is with us, right here, third row back, 4th from the left, though we often have trouble recognizing him.

And at the same time, God is everywhere else as well, having gone on ahead of us to Galilee.

Or was it Kalihi?

How shall we tell the world who Jesus is?

By doing what Jesus does.

Now go, and tell.

+amen.