

In the wrong place?

Acts 17²²⁻³¹; Psalm 66^{7-end}; 1 Peter 3^{13-end}; John 14¹⁵⁻²¹

Come and listen all you who fear God. (Psalm 66¹⁴)

This is an exciting time in the Church year: we have celebrated - and continue to celebrate - the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In this coming week we will celebrate the Ascension of Jesus and then after that we wait the 10 days until the celebration of Pentecost, luxuriating in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In the reading from Acts today we almost have a warning about attempting to do things in advance of God or without God's specific help through the Holy Spirit for whom we wait in these days.

- ✦ Acts 17¹⁶ (before our reading begins) records **while Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols**. This may seem innocent enough and you can understand why Paul debated with **some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers**. What is important to note that, in the Acts of the Apostles, this is the only time that Paul engaged on a preaching mission without having been directed to do so by the Holy Spirit.
- ✦ Perhaps that is why, instead of the usual conclusion to Paul's visit, instead of recording that a Church had been founded, the text simply says (after our reading ends) **we will hear you again about this and some of them joined him and became believers**.

Paul may have been clever in his use of the visual aid of the unknown God and in his ability to quote Greek poets (***In him we live and move and have our being***), but intellect without inspiration from God is futile.

Jesus makes this clear when he promises the disciples **another comforter** and goes on to say **This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him**.

How can we know that the Spirit leads and we don't make the same mistake as Paul? The answer, as always, is in the text:

- ✦ Christians are a community people: there are no free-lance Christians - we are subject to God and to one another. Jesus tells us that God is a community and that the, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, need each other. As God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit live dependent on each other, so as Christians we live our lives unashamedly dependent on God and wholly dependent on each other.
- ✦ Paul has acted on his own - together we discover what God has for us as a community and as individuals.
- ✦ The test of God's action is always seen as his people rise to the challenge to **love one another**. We know we are loved by God and we try to respond to that love by loving him.
- ✦ Paul was trying to be clever rather than loving. People are never persuaded into God's kingdom, but they can be loved into God's kingdom.
- ✦ **They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me**. God is consistent with himself, so those things where God is loved and our neighbour is loved is always consistent with what God wants.

We are used to words and persuasion in the world around us:

Computer hackers 'persuade' us to part with money so that the computers on which we have become so dependent continue to work.

Politicians are wearing words out around us as they woo our votes - but experience shows that there is a difference between a promise and policy.

What the spirit calls us to do - to share faith and love - doesn't always make sense to the world, but it has the promise and potential to transform it.