

Pauline-like reflection on Acts 17:22-31:

'Hearing Wisdom Beyond the Familiar – God is Never Far from Us.'

One of the things I've done in the past is write from the centre of what's happening, on one occasion I wrote from the heart of a woman who had committed her life to Jesus, and found herself standing amongst the enthusiastic crowd of people shouting wildly, 'crucify him'. Another time I wrote from the perspective of Jesus mother sitting at the foot of the cross. History tells us what happened to Jesus. Today, I'm sharing with you my thoughts on what it may have been like to be amongst the Athenians the people to whom Paul was mixing and teaching amongst.

In the midst of Athens, I stood among a city of ideas, a place where people daily traded questions about the gods and the good life as I recall that centuries earlier Athens was the place to be if you were an artist, poet, or someone who was considered to a philosopher. I did not come to cast down every idol with thunderous decree, but to invite a broader of conversation that might lead us to the living God. Standing among the poets and philosophers, I learned anew that *God's* wisdom does not lie only in a single sanctuary or a single scripture, but in the many voices of neighbors beyond my own circle.

You may recall the moment I walked through their market and heard a city full of poets and thinkers. I did not disdain their words; instead I listened. And as I listened, a strong thread began to form—a thread that would weave together our faith and their longings. I saw that the Athenians themselves had framed a city-wide search for truth, even if their conclusions had not yet named the God who made heaven and earth. So, I quoted them, not to flatter or to assert a clever triumph, but to show that truth often travels in company, that wisdom frequently arrives in disguise, and that God has prepared paths for us to meet Him in places we might not expect.

I recalled their own lines: "In him we live and move and have our being." It was not a boast of arrogant knowledge, but a confession that the one true God is the ground of all our life—our breath, our steps, our moving through the day. And I reminded them, and now, I remind us, that every life bears the imprint of the Creator, even when the eyes have not yet recognised Him. When we notice that we live within a reality greater than our own schemes, we begin to glimpse a God who is not distant but near, not an idea but a person who invites relationship.

Then I added another line from the ancient Greek poet Aratus of Soli's poem '*Phaenomena*' about the stars and weather, which he wrote to Zeus —not to claim ownership of the truth, but to honor the seed God had planted in human soil: "For we are indeed his offspring." If we are someone's offspring, then we belong to a family whose Father's house is larger than our apartment of beliefs. This is a humility that opens ears. It means we can learn from neighbors who practice hospitality as a *daily* liturgy, from artists who translate sorrow into beauty, from scientists who map the stars with awe, from teachers who plant courage in young hearts, from businesspeople who steward resources with a longing for the common good. God's wisdom is not exhausted by one school or one creed; it travels in laboratories, kitchens, studios, classrooms, streets, and little communities even little stone churches on the Yass Road where life is shared.

What might it look like for us to notice God's wisdom expressed through people we might not expect perhaps not even condone? It begins with listening as a form of worship. To listen to the grandmother who rewrites stories with patient courage for grandchildren who have run far from the church; to listen to the muralist who paints with color what the Bible names as justice and mercy; to listen to the immigrant mother who teaches resilience through crackling hope and song; to listen

to the Information Technologist who builds tools that connect strangers into neighbors via the website. Each voice testifies to truth that our own tradition might not fully articulate, yet truth remains true with or without formal proclamation.

Paul's aim wasn't to end his dialogue with a polished creed, but to invite a decision from his listeners to seek the God who may be found by those who earnestly seek. We, too, are invited to join this ongoing conversation—among neighbors who gather in coffee shops, among artists and crafters who shape culture, among thinkers who chase clarity, among communities formed in faith, in doubt, in silence, and in renewal. God's divine wisdom already at work in the world isn't a rival to the gospel; it gives us a pathway signposting and guiding us toward the fullness of truth revealed in Christ.

So may we intentionally practice attentiveness:

- notice what moves others to compassion;
 - notice what prepares others into gratitude;
 - notice what enlarges the circle of care beyond our own walls.
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- When we hear a poet or musicians' metaphor about the beacon of light,
 - when we hear a nurse or doctor speak of mercy,
 - when we hear a student describe wonder at a formula which can do more goodness in the world,
 - when we hear a craftsman describe a patient loom of labor; may we receive these as part of a larger witness.

The God who made all things isn't confined to a single building, but is the living source built upon a strong foundational stone, behind the hands that create, the minds that question, the communities that sustain, and the friendships that heal.

In this way, our faith becomes less a private certainty and more a public invitation: come, see who God is. The wisdom that built Athens remains alive today in the people we meet. If we listen with reverence, we may hear the same refrain—over and over again, that in Him we live and move and have our being; that indeed we are His offspring. And in hearing, we may turn toward the God who invites us to belong, to learn, and to become a people who bear witness to wisdom beyond ourselves.

Let us pray:

Lord God, maker of heaven and earth, you whom we unknowingly seek in many places, grant us hearts that are awake to recognise you in the faces and attitudes before us. Help us to live in you, to breathe as your offspring, and to seek your truth beyond our own columns of thought. Forgive our ignorance, quiet whispers under our breaths, call us to into a changed way of being, and fill our communities with justice, mercy, and enduring hope in the risen Christ Jesus amen.