

Paul started to address the philosophers of Athens with the observation that Athens was truly a divinity fearing community: there were places of worship (altars, temples and shrines) throughout the city. Athenians presented multiple offerings in a desire to avoid the anger or displeasure of the god represented at each individual shrine. They had a fear of punishment if they displeased one of the fickle deities. These gods were wrapped up in their own rivalries and ambitions, devoid of moral character, and humans had best watch out if they got in the way.

The Greeks were always concerned over offending these gods. They were so concerned about getting on the wrong side of some vengeful god that they included an altar to an unknown god. Just in case they had missed one, perhaps one who had not revealed itself to mankind or had been lost in history (or the busyness of everyday life), they wanted to be protected. An extra offering was better than bad consequences.

Paul seized upon this as an opportunity that was too good to be true. For in fact, the Greeks had missed a God, the God, the God whose self revelation started in Genesis and continued through Jesus the Christ. This God was not unknown, just not yet known by these people. Paul proceeded to tell them about this God.

Paul's sermon started with God as the creator, not just of the physical planet, but of the universe and the entire order of nature, the relationships within that universe. Since God had created all things, had created the world in which we lived, God was not confined to temples erected by man on God's behalf. Paul next told them that God is a

Provider: God provides all things that we need. Just as God does not dwell in man-made temples, God does not need the idols fashioned by human hands.

Many of the Greek philosophers would have been agreeing, or at least acknowledging, these claims. Paul continued to tell them that God is the Ruler. God has placed boundaries between nations and peoples, God has decreed the times and places of history. God is sovereign and in control.

Paul stayed into what the Greeks would consider shaky ground, the idea of a sovereign God by declaring that God is both Judge and Savior. The person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to demonstrate God's love for mankind. This is a God who cares more about humanity than petty rivalries between competing deities. Through Christ, God offered an alternative to judgment. Some Greeks were incredulous that there might be an alternative to the random acts, the random punishments, blamed upon their gods. They could not believe that they did not need to fear this previously unknown God. Other Greeks were puzzled at the ideas, perhaps even amused by the radical newness of such claims, but remain unconvinced. For the, arguing philosophy was more important than believing.

Paul did not convince all who heard him. Nor did Paul try to convince all who heard him. He did not mock or belittle what the Greeks worshiped. Instead, Paul relied upon the promise of Christ. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come and convince people of the truth of these claims, the truth of the Good News of God's love

for all of mankind.

Like the Greeks, we have many places at which we can worship. We too are divinity-fearing people. For much of our country, the God they worship is in fact an unknown god: good for bumper stickers and dollar bills, but not one to get to know, not one to worship beyond a nagging concern about perhaps alienating this god.

We have the opportunity to know the God, the one the Greeks called the Unknown God. We can worship the God that Paul told them about, the God who creates, who provides, who rules and who is our Saviour. This is no longer an unknown God but the God made known both through Scripture and even more so by the life of Jesus.

We gather together to worship this God, the God above all other gods. We do not come out of fear of punishment nor to avoid God's anger. We come to worship in thankful response to the love that God has shown toward us. Like the Greeks, we come to acknowledge that there is one more powerful than us, one who is in control. We come to worship, to learn more about this God. Over and over, God states that "I will be your God and you will be my people." This God desires that we know God, that we know God's love for us, and that we decide to be God's people as we offer ourselves, our hearts, in response to God's love.

Today, we worship the Known God as we bring our offerings of praise and thanksgiving. We worship as we bring our pledges of our time, our talents, our treasure.

We worship as we acknowledge that we have these things because God has provided them. Let us return a portion of what we have so that others might know this God, might find the wonder and joy and love we have found as we worship the Known God.