

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

(Acts 17:16-34)

Q: How do we communicate the good news to our/any culture?

A: We must speak the language of our listeners

*While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, **he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.** ¹⁷So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸**A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers** began to debate with him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” Others remarked, “He seems to be advocating foreign gods.” They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean.” ²¹(All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)*

*²²Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! **I see that in every way you are very religious.** ²³For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, **I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So, you are ignorant of the very thing you worship**—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.*

*²⁴“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. ²⁵And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. ²⁶From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸**For in him we live and move and have our being.** ²⁹**As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’** ²*

*²⁹“**Therefore since we are God’s offspring,** we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. ³⁰In the past God overlooked such **ignorance**, but now he commands all people everywhere to **repent.** ³¹For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”*

³²When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject.” ³³At that, Paul left the Council. ³⁴Some of the people became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

¹ Cretan philosopher, Epimenides

² Cilician Stoic philosopher, Aratus

Communicate the whole gospel using your listener's language

- So, what is the language of today's listeners?
- How can we speak it?

Jesus was scandalously risky with his language. He compared God to an unjust judge and an unfair boss. He held up a crooked steward as an example of the kingdom. He said that prostitutes would enter the kingdom before the Bible scholars.... **Spiritual realities require risky language**, unless you think they can be reduced to little formulations.
(Brian McLaren, *The Story We Find Ourselves In*)

Swaddling clothes and a manger are the symbols of Christ's birth. Powerful symbols. Remember the manger was a feeding trough for animals, and swaddling clothes were the poor's means of dressing and diapering their young. **In these symbols God sanctified the ordinary, intertwined the sacred with the secular, wedded the spiritual to the material.**
(Richard J. Foster, *Spiritual Classics*)

All truth is God's truth, wherever truth is found. (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*)

Following the example of the apostle Paul, pray that I may strive always:

- To have Scripture as my final authority of truth
- To *extract* truth from secular sources
- To use secular sources to *illustrate* truth

Let us, in heaven's name, drag out the divine drama from under the dreadful accumulation of slipshod thinking and trashy sentiment heaped upon it, and set it on an open stage to startle the world into some sort of vigorous reaction. If the pious are the first to be shocked, so much worse for the pious—others will pass into the kingdom of heaven before them. If all men are offended because of Christ, let them be offended; but where is the sense of their being offended at something that is not Christ and is nothing like him? We do him singularly little honor by watering down his personality till it could not offend a fly. Surely it is not the business if the Church to adapt Christ to men, but to adapt men to Christ.
(Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church*)