

Sermon about Acts 17, 22-34 on Jubilate 2021 in BXL (III^N)

Blessing: Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Bible: (22) So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. (23) For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. (26) And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, (27) that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, (28) for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ (29) Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (30) The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, (31) because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” (32) Now when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked. But others said, “We will hear you again about this.” (33) So Paul went out from their midst. (34) But some men joined him and believed, among whom also were Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Prayer: O Lord, my creator, redeemer, and comforter, as I come to worship You in spirit and in truth, I humbly pray that You would open my heart to the preaching of Your Word so that I may repent of my sins, believe in Jesus Christ as my only Saviour, and grow in grace and holiness. Hear me for the sake of His name. Amen.

Sermon: *Opener – Invitation to a spring walk through the city:* Dear Friends, it is springtime, and it is Sunday. Good reasons for a nice spring Sunday walk through the awakening city. I invite you to join me. We see the wonderful blossoming trees in front of the houses lining the streets, tulips and daffodils in the garden and on traffic islands, everywhere singing birds. The sun is shining warmer every day. Life and green are gaining the upper hand over the muddy brown of the winter. The Creation is beautiful. Life is so perfectly made by God. From the tiniest cell over the small green leaves which come out of a little seed to the biggest creatures and beautiful stars – a miracle. Many reasons to rejoice. – But when we walk through the city, we see also other things: temples of cold steel and glass. Temples of our idols: worshipping money, proclaiming oppressing power over others, worshipping the environment not as the Creation of God but as an earth-godhead in whom our salvation lays, temples of progress and science, temples where we worship our youth and health. The Apostle Paul became angry by seeing all the temples and idols of the Greeks in Athens. – I am a bit unfair I know. We probably need many of these mentioned institutions. And of course, it could be important and healthy to go regularly to the gym. The question must always be which priority, which significance these things have for my life, if they get a religious touch or if they stay necessary, worldly instruments for life – not the source of life and salvation themselves.

Part 1 – *God the Creator:* We are looking for meanings of life. We are searching for answers. A few years ago, it was said that we live in a post-religious world. Some said – fortunately and eventually – people overcame religion. The

withdrawal from the traditional churches is the best sign for it that we live in a post-religious world, at least in the western countries. Today we know that this assumption was wrong. People are still religious, just in another way. Probably many people do not sense it actively or consciously but most of all people trust in something, believe in some kind of power which influences their lives. I know people who call themselves still Christian but confess that they have always believed in numbers of natural sciences first. Then they trust overall, not seeing that they are just numbers of natural sciences and not gods who are able to carry their lives in all circumstances beyond natural laws. On the other hand esoteric, pseudo-scientific ideas are in vogue, the opinion that some dark, evil powers behind national governments or global companies steer the destiny of the world and that true salvation lays in my own “nation” or “people”. I know people who have become stubborn climate protectors and who give the impression that their salvation depends on avoiding using plastic bottles, and who say that the church is no longer up to date because church does not protect the environment. Not to mention people who just seem to live for their work. Work and progress and promotion as the only important things and aims in life. – There is a lot of good will in these things. There is a lot of correct assumptions. Natural sciences are good tools to deal with life on earth. Currently in the pandemic we see how natural sciences can help. Protecting the environment is an important part of God’s order to rule the world. This cannot mean something else than to maintain and *protect* the Creation for the *benefit of all creatures*. Knowing that evil is a serious threat in this world can lead me to the awareness of sin and repentance – I *myself* am a bearer of evil. These examples show that we humans have something in us that propels us not just to sit in the entrance to our stone age cave and to wait for the next tiger who eats us. It shows that there is something in us which tells us that there is more than we can see that there is a meaning behind the curtain of sensible things

we could try to explore with natural sciences or philosophies. Theology and philosophy call this impulse “natural theology”. It is rooted in the fact that we are God’s creatures, created in His image, after His likeness (Gen 1, 26). We have something godly in us. Therefore, we ask for something godly. But a long time ago, we stopped calling these things “god” but nevertheless they can get religious, godly streaks. The thing is that we cannot know or understand the root of it without revelation. Without the Word of God which shows us the truth, these things remain for us idols of an unknown, invisible God.

Part 2 – God the Redeemer: We are not bad in principle. Not all our ambitions are wrong. *But they are and remain patchwork.* Often misled. Our tries and errors will *never* bring us to the awaited aim. We cannot interpenetrate all wisdoms of life *without* the Creator of life. We cannot manage life best *without* the preserver of life. We cannot sustain life *without* the Conqueror of death. We cannot be good *without* the general good. The Apostle Paul once said after his spring walk through Athens to the people, simple people and great philosophers likewise, searchers of wisdom and truth: “Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ Being then God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.” – *God is near to us.* He, who can give all this to us, wisdom, truth, orientation, satisfaction, life, is alive, likewise us with flesh and blood. He can be seen and met. It is our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. His life was *newly created* by God in heaven. The Creator who has the power over all by him created natural laws to create life anew. To make things right, to bring in order what others or I have broken in life. – I believe that, and I invite you to join me in this faith! I cannot explain all bad things in the world. I do not know why God allows this or that disaster. But I know that my faith in the almighty Creator and His

mercy in Jesus Christ, and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit is the power which carries me in my life. It gives me the feeling that I am not alone. It gives me the hope that in the end everything will be right. I am convinced that no other idea, or belief, or religion, or ideology in this world can give that. This faith gives me satisfaction for the things I have. This gives me the power to go on in times of stress, or weakness, or even after failure. And with the view of faith, I see so many blessings and protection in my life which cannot be explained just by coincidence.

Consequence – Repent and rejoice: God is strong. God is almighty. God can create life and he can re-create life. He did it once and for all in and with Jesus Christ on Easter. And I truly believe that He will do once more with me. We are no longer doomed to search for idols and to build temples for them. God has revealed himself in His holy Word and in His son Jesus Christ. Come to him, turn from your old ways of life, and join Him. Then we will rejoice together about the new creation and salvation. – The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Blessing: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.