

6Easter, Acts 17:22-31 (John 14:15-21)  
Rev. Kimberly Glenn  
May 10, 2026

Come and listen, all you who fear God, and hear what he has done for you and me.  
Amen.

A comedian named Pete Holmes once told a surprisingly profound story. He said there are basically two groups of people in the world: those who believe God created the universe, and those who believe everything came out of nothing. He says the “nothing people” often make fun of the “God people.” They say, “C’mon! You know, God doesn’t exist!”

And Holmes responds, “Well... maybe. But you know what definitely doesn’t exist? Nothing. In fact,” he says, “that’s the defining characteristic of nothing. It doesn’t exist. “So,” he goes on, “what exactly are we talking about here? Either: everything came from “nothing” — something you cannot see, taste, touch, or scientifically prove, **or**: everything came from God — something you cannot see, taste, touch, or scientifically prove. Then he delivers the punchline. He says: “If your nothing somehow spontaneously erupted into everything, well, that’s a pretty magical nothing.”

Going on with the story he says, “When you ask the ‘nothing people’ what happens when you die, they say, ‘Nothing. You go back into nothing.’” And the comedian responds: “Oh... you mean you merge back with your creator?”

Now people laugh when they hear that because it catches us off guard. But underneath that humor is a deep truth: human beings are curious about all things spiritual. They cannot stop asking questions about things of the spirit. All of us are people who are curious. We instinctively want to understand things. We want to know things. No matter how much science or technology we master, or how literally and

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culturally informed we become, something inside us keeps reaching out toward mystery. We are not very different from the ancient Greek philosophers that the apostle Paul encounters in the Acts 17.

Paul is in Athens, one of the intellectual capitals of the ancient world. This is not Jerusalem. He is away from Israel, away from the comfort of synagogues and chatting with rabbis. He is in the cultural center of the ancient world where ideas, philosophies, arguments, and idols present competing visions of truth.

Luke tells us that Paul was distressed by all the idols in the city. There were temples built in honor of various gods everywhere with statues erected in them for people to worship and admire. The Acropolis and the Parthenon were enormous temple sites high up on a hill in Athens. They could be seen from all points of the city.

Paul knew that the gods they worshiped were false gods. In Paul's mind their worship was folly. When he encountered some intellectuals on his way up to the Acropolis he could have mocked their religion. He could have denounced them as hopeless pagans. But he doesn't do that. Instead, Paul begins with words of respect. He respected them as intellectual equals.

He stood before the council of the Areopagus, that is the name of the location itself on a place called Mars Hill. The council that gathered there was made up of educated philosophical leaders. When he greeted them Paul said, "I see how extremely religious you are in every way."

He was not being sarcastic. He knew that all those temples and idols had significant religious meaning for them. But Paul also insightfully recognized something

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important. He sensed that beneath all their confusion, beneath all the competing idols, beneath all their religious understandings that he thought were empty and mistaken, these men had an emptiness, a spiritual longing that only Christ could satisfy.

That is where our world meets the ancient world, the culture Paul encounters in this story. We know the statistics. In the past decade, people have left the church in large numbers. Lots of people say they are spiritual but not religious, meaning, I think, that they do not like the institution of the church. So many say they don't like 'organized religion.' Perhaps this story in Acts is a great lesson for the Church in our own age to carefully consider.

People today may not always know the language of the faith we all share. They likely are not familiar with the stories from the Bible that people involved in church know. They may not trust institutions in general. They may struggle with the very idea of Jesus' resurrection just as the Greeks did. They may not know that it is through him that our faith is embodied. They may wonder how the God we know and love and worship guides our actions in the world. Nevertheless, many of them say they are spiritual.

Perhaps, they are searching for something that will give their human life meaning. You can hear and see signs of it everywhere. We see and hear them searching for a way to bring peace, wholeness and healing to this world. They know deep down that the answer must come from something somehow that is beyond the capacity of humanity. In a word, they are searching for transcendence. And often they search in places that cannot fully satisfy their needs and desires.

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The Athenians literally built altars to many gods. When one god couldn't satisfy they turned to another god. Their gods could not ultimately satisfy their longings. Don't we do that, too? We may not build temples to our gods with a lower case 'g,' but we worship them anyway. The gods that some people in our society worship are from money and fame, politicians and sports stars, and all kinds of celebrities. We pay homage to those who climb the ladder of success. Instead of going to worship God with a capital 'G,' we spend all our time and money driving our kids to travel sports games because we fall at the feet of those who tell us our kids will be ill-served if we don't.

These lower case 'g' gods are not evil in themselves, but we give them power over us. We ask them to give us worth. We ask them to give us meaning. We ask them to calm our fears. We ask them to make us complete. The danger of that is that those small 'g' gods cannot bear that kind of weight so they tend to put the weight of our desires back on our own shoulders. We carry the weight of those small g gods failures, i.e. their not being able to satisfy our longings. Do you think that might be why so many people feel exhausted?

The gods of success always demand more success. The gods of outrage always demand more outrage. The gods of consumption always demand more consumption. The gods of self-invention never stop demanding reinvention. False gods always demand more than they give.

And it is into that kind of world that Paul speaks, not words condemning the Athenian gods, but words that connect him with the men of the council. He quotes their poets. He speaks their language. He understands their culture well enough to speak

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into it. When he tells them about the God he worships, he says, "For in him we live and move and have our being." Paul borrowed that language from Greek philosophical thought.

You see, Paul understands something that we in the Church must never forget. If we want to speak to seekers, we must first learn how to hear them. Paul wanted to build a bridge between the false gods of Athens to the gospel message of Christ.

Perhaps that is part of our calling now. Perhaps we need to become fluent enough in the language of our neighbors - acknowledging their fears, their loneliness, their exhaustion, their spiritual questions and longings - so that we can recognize the hunger for Christ that lurks underneath it all. Maybe all the chaos, violence, and unrest in our world is a symptom of a deep ache for resurrection; a deep longing for the kind of new life that faith in Christ can bring.

You see, resurrection means that meaninglessness and death do not have the last word. Resurrection means human beings are not doomed forever to worship false gods. Resurrection means Christ is alive and inviting us into a resurrected life now, in this human moment. We don't have to wait until we are parted from this life by death. But we might have to allow our false self to die.

A life resurrected by faith in Christ means a life no longer ruled by fear, no longer enslaved to status seeking, no longer captive to endless striving. The resurrected life is grounded in what the Greeks called the LOGOS, that is the orderly wisdom that undergirds all of reality.

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The Logos is Jesus Christ. When we lose sight of that, we begin worshiping smaller gods. When we begin to live a resurrected life in Christ, everything changes. Achievement becomes a gift instead of an idol. Technology becomes a tool instead of a master. Politics becomes important but not ultimate. Our possessions become useful but not sacred.

The divine one, Christ, can bear the weight of our worship and satisfy our souls. Like Paul did in Athens, our task is to notice the altars people are building to false gods and gently point beyond them instead of haughtily or angrily trying to destroy them. We can point beyond them by serving the needs of our own communities with humility and love, not because we want fame or money or praise but because we want to make other people feel loved.

The same God Paul proclaimed at the Areopagus is still moving in the world, still stirring hearts, still inspiring a longing for the holy. God is still leading human hearts to seek the risen Christ. After all, it is Christ in whom we live and move and have our being. It is into His loving heart that we will all one day merge. Christ wants to be one with us, now and forever. Amen.