

Eddie Donaldson

All Saints Milford-on-Sea

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Acts 17 : 22-31, John 14 : 15-21

While we will all have had different experiences of the impact of lockdown, one thing we all share is that things have been very different from what we were used to before. While my experience of lockdown has been a busy one , having so much time in my home has meant that I have noticed things that I have missed before.

I have seen some things in new ways ..simple things, things that had been around for some time (things I had taken for granted)...like I sat in a different chair in my sitting room and found myself enjoying looking at a painting that had been on the wall for years but I had not really appreciated it for a long time. The light, the colours and the memories around where we bought it were suddenly precious and appreciated.

Even seeing my garden from new angles, watching (with the grandchildren) the flowers blossom and bloom and change from week to week , things that had passed me by before suddenly enjoyed and appreciated (just a pity about the weeds).

So lock down has given us the opportunity to see things in new ways

So with that thought in mind let's turn to our first reading from Acts 17:

Paul has arrived in Athens and is greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols, and with his heart burning to share the good news of Jesus he enters into vigorous debate with those in the city : **Read Acts 17 17-19** . And this is when Paul draws upon his wisdom and ability to flex his approach with an understanding of the background of the people he is speaking to...he does not preach at them but draws alongside them.

He recognises that they are religious, that they are surrounded by objects of worship, he then draws upon what was right in front of their eyes pointing to an alter to an unknown god. He makes the point to them '**So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship**' v23 (How crazy is that !)and then he has his '**Have I got news for you**' moment and he gives the background to Jesus' mission and the purpose. He recognises God's power as creator , of mankind being created to enjoy a full relationship with God, of man's disobedience and separation from God and the route through Jesus's death and resurrection for that relationship to be restored,,,,,.....and it was the resurrection of Jesus which Paul was so sure of because of his own personal experience of Jesus in his life, that became the crunch point for those around him.

As many were philosophers they were probably able to accept much of what Paul was saying but when he spoke of Jesus being raised from the dead, there was the challenge. It broke through their pattern of thinking, it would mean all their worship of idols was irrelevant, it would call for

repentance and a totally new way of life.

...and the result , 'some of them sneered and some of them believed ' .

A time of challenge for them but an opportunity to see things in a new way.

For some that idol to an unknown god changed from being a useless insurance policy into a reminder of the vacuum in their lives without a relationship with God, spurring them on to experience God through the life and death of our Lord Jesus.

I find Paul's enthusiasm to share the good news of Jesus quite a challenge. Too often I am restrained by anticipating what people's reaction will be.

...but we are in a situation where many have time to think and ponder, and others face some terrible hardship and sadness. What a time to be open to share the love of God which we have experienced, through our actions and words.

And whatever our situation we can look for this to be a time when God can help us see things in new ways.. opportunities we never saw before ,

perhaps the experience to graciously receive rather than be the giver,

things that we do for others that we considered small which we now realise are truly valued.

An opportunity to appreciate what we have got rather than what we have not got (and be thankful for it)

perhaps an opportunities to restore a relationship (that could have a major impact)

opportunities to share in new ways,

opportunities to look again at what are the priorities in our lives ,

opportunities to do new things in new ways !

(I have been used to zooming around the country from meeting to meeting, now I've got used to zooming without even leaving my home !-- So that is sure to impact in some way in the future.)

And 'Have I got even more news for you ' care of the apostle John ...Looking for God to show us things in new ways and to do things in new ways is not something we work out by ourselves.. once we have responded and accepted Jesus and seek to live our lives according to his purposes for us then we have God's help through the Holy Spirit to guide us and lead us . **John 14 : 15,16 – If you love me keep my commands, and I will ask my Father and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever- the Spirit of truth.**

Let our prayer be today to see our situation through God's perspective, that through the guidance of the Holy Spirit , God would guide us into new opportunities and give us the desire of Paul to share the love and good news of Jesus .