



Acts 17:16 *“Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.”*

Paul is on his second missionary journey. Acts 17 begins with Paul and Silas arriving in Thessalonica. We read that they start preaching the gospel in the synagogue and some were persuaded by their teaching. However, the Jewish leaders were not happy with this situation and so they cause an uproar against them. Realizing it was unsafe to stay in Thessalonica, the believers send Paul and Silas to Berea.

When they arrive in Berea, they go straight to the synagogue in order to preach the gospel. Again, many people believed. Unfortunately, the Jews from Thessalonica found out what's going on in Berea and start yet another uproar, so Paul moves on.

Paul is now on his way to Corinth (Acts 18), and finds himself in Athens. What's he doing in Athens? He's waiting. What's he waiting for? He's waiting for his friends — Silas and Timothy — to join him. Everything that follows next is because Paul was waiting.

Where do you wait? at the doctor's surgery? at the grocery shop? at the post office? or for that diagnoses to arrive?

But Paul isn't merely waiting — at least not like we might typically wait. While Paul waits, he's on the lookout — he's listening, he's watching, he's observing — for new opportunities to share the message of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes I wonder how many opportunities we miss because we're too busy, too preoccupied, too distracted. We're simply not listening. Listening for opportunities that might lead to real heartfelt conversations about our faith.

In our text, we see Paul engaging two different groups of people. We read that he reasoned "in the synagogue" and he reasoned "in the marketplace." When Paul reasons with the Jews in the synagogue, he goes straight to their scriptures to connect the dots between the prophesied Messiah in the Old Testament and Jesus. When Paul reasons with the philosophers in the marketplace, he takes a different approach. For most of these Athenians, the Christian God is a completely foreign concept. It's a "new teaching" or a "strange thing."

Athens was a very diverse place and a hot spot for philosophical views. There were Jews, who worshipped a single God. But there were also those who worshipped many gods. And some who worshipped no god at all.

There's a saying: "The fool says in his heart: the rightness of my theology makes up for the wrongness of my attitude." So when Paul is dragged off to the Areopagus to give an account of his teachings he begins graciously with common ground. "I see how extremely religious you are in every way" Paul may begin with a compliment, but he's about to offer a correction. The Athenians have objects of worship to every god under the Sun—and including the Sun. And, just in case they've missed one out, they have an altar set up to the "unknown god." Paul is going to tell them who this Unknown God really is.

As in Paul's day, there are many today who are confused about who God really is, so how might we share our faith? There's a lot we can learn from St Paul.

Listen for opportunities to engage with the people around you.

Respond graciously. Our attitude is just as important as our argument.

Know deeply. We need to know the truth before we can speak the truth.

Reason wisely. We are to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

Speak boldly. God has given us a message. Don't be afraid to proclaim it.

And whatever the response, don't measure success in terms of the results. Rather, do your best and then trust God to use your efforts for His glory.

It's not our mission to save people - our mission is to introduce them to the One who does.

Every blessing, Linda