

speaking in the language of the Greeks about their gods? Because his words “In Him we live and move and have our being;” appear to be a direct quote from an old Greek philosopher. The answer to these questions lies with the One God Himself, who made everything. With the One God who doesn’t just abandon us as we are but who intervenes and wants to be a part of our lives. Paul stood in the **middle** of Athens because he was convinced that this One God has something to say to every single person. The God that Paul talks about is the same God we worship Sunday after Sunday, who we hope will answer our prayers and who we hope will give us eternal life. This God who we worship, wanted to be in the middle of the Greek Areopagus at that time. And He also wants to be in the middle of our community today. He wants His voice to be heard. And He wants people to find faith or to find their way back to faith. I recently received an email from a completely new program that was started in the SELK (*SELK is the name of our church*). It is called *SELK for Future*. The organizers of this initiative lament that fewer and fewer young people belong to church. Although it’s not as though young people don’t have an interest in faith. Rather it’s that the language of the church is no longer understood. Can it be that we missed the path of the apostle Paul into the middle of the community? Back then, Paul said that for the sake of the Gospel he would become a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks. Shouldn’t we also today for the sake of the Gospel be a young person to the young people and even an atheist to the atheists? Can it be that we no longer trust this path into the middle of society because we are scared that we could lose our power to form opinions and let all sorts of ideas overwhelm us? The apostle Paul doesn’t appear to know this fear. He dares to go to the central place of culture of the Greeks, dares to use their language. Even dares to search for the point of connection with their own gods. The Greeks had namely added next to their many other gods another one that they called the *unknown god*. Their idea was that this *unknown god* should be worshiped in case one of the multitude of gods had been forgotten. That way it could always be said that this was the one they meant by the unknown god. And Paul begins with this *unknown god*. We notice very quickly that Paul doesn’t just tell the Greeks what they want to hear, but beginning with the *unknown god*, he talks about how the Greeks have been searching for God up to now. “Mankind search for God. That’s true!” says Paul: We search for Him in our ideas, in our feelings, in our laws, or even in impressive nature experiences. But when we harden ourselves to the fact that we only encounter God where we want Him or where we expect Him, we are talking about something other than God. God doesn’t let Himself be packed into imaginary or desired boxes by us. And then Paul presents the Greeks with a huge challenge. And says: This unknown god that you worship by chance. He is the One. The One who isn’t made by hands. The One who made everything. The One who can neither be created from the human mind nor from a sculptor’s workshop. And then Paul talks again from the hearts of the Greek philosophers: This God is near us. But He is not near to us because we humans are divine, like the Greeks said, rather the One God is near to us because this almighty God is human. Paul recognizes that the Greeks search for God even if they tried with their many gods. And beginning with this search, he leads them to the goal. Actually, you are only searching for the One God in all you do! He is and remains the One! The other! And this God is interested in us. He wants us to know that He made us! We should finally stop insisting that we can make God. He is the Creator of people. We are not the creators of God.

Whoever encounters this God must repent. Must put his feelings aside. Must put his wishes for how God should be behind him. God alone should speak. What this God says through Paul placed a huge challenge before the Greeks at the time, who believed in an eternal return of nature. God wants to lead everything to a great judgement of the world. Everything that we humans are. Everything that we humans achieved and did. Everything that we also failed to do comes down to one point. God’s

judgment. That is a disturbing thought. And yet we sense that there is such a thing as square one. God commands that everyone everywhere and at every end repent. Paul's audience at that time are shocked. They haven't yet thought of God like that. Paul introduces a God who can not only be discussed but who also intervenes. Who wants something from us. God is not a stationary sculpture but comes to us and wants something of us. Asks us what we have done with the life He's given us. Also asks us what we have done with the precious Gospel He entrusted to us. Whoever has something to do with this God has to break bridges behind them. Must change his life. Everything must become new.

Such a judgment of God doesn't happen on its own. Someone must stand behind it. Something must happen. And that's exactly what the apostle proclaims so energetically. Who is God? He is the God who comes to us. The God who can neither be carved into stone nor be bought through piety. No, Paul proclaims the God who created life and who bears life in Himself. And who brings this same life also to us. A God who became human and with all that implies! A God who engages with the world. A God who has compassion and also suffers the fate of this world and everything that lives within it. Not a fair-weather god for good days but a God who says: "I am with you every day until the end of the world." A God who was not spared the lot of death. A God who suffers. What Paul says was unbelievable. Not a God for whom you must build an altar on which to sacrifice to Him but a God who sacrificed Himself for us. Much of it is and remains incomprehensible, then as now. A God who is far away and yet comes so close to us because how we are doing matters to Him. That doesn't fit the imagination of the scholars that Paul faced, and it doesn't fit with our imaginations. And all of this is decided and confirmed in one person. the resurrected Jesus! He, Jesus, is the man who makes demons shudder, even now as then!

In the end, the question remains, how did it all turn out? Only a few came to believe. Paul must have been disappointed as a speaker in the Areopagus, as he reaped only the mockery of most gathered there. And in the end, he again went out from their midst. All of that surely didn't leave him unaffected. And we also won't get around this experience of disappointment that not everyone can be rejoice in the message of the Gospel. The outcome of Paul's sermon sound modern again. Some mock directly. Others want to hear it again later. And a few come to faith. This is how the Christian community comes into being. This is how the Church came into being. That's how it grew. That's how it still lives today. Amen.