

Who here knows the origin story of the ancient goddess Athena?

It's an interesting story... you see there was this other god named Zeus - you may know him as that guy with the lightning bolts. Well, Zeus began having an intimate relationship with Metis, a Titan. Titans were the old generation of gods, before Zeus and those like him came around and kicked them out of power. Well, Metis conceived.

This was a problem for Zeus because he had been told that any offspring of Metis would become greater than him. So he did the only sensible thing - he ate Metis. He consumed her whole.

Naturally, Metis survived, and she ended up giving birth to a daughter, named Athena, inside of Zeus. She continued to nurture Athena inside of Zeus until he began to complain of terrible headaches. So, once again, Zeus did the only reasonable thing: he had his own head split open, and out popped Athena, fully armed and ready for battle!

Crazy story, right?

The really crazy part... The ancient Athenians believe this story and that worshiping Athena would bring them peace. Like, if you lived in ancient Athens and you were worried about the future, afraid of what might happen to you or those you love, the advice you'd get from the average Athenian would be, "Go, offer a sacrifice to Athena - that lady who popped out of Zeus' head."

As crazy as this is to our modern minds, I see some striking similarities between the Athenians and people today.

First, there is the common need. Whether you live in Greece in 500BC or America in 2020, this is a scary world. The tremendous responsibilities of life, of providing for yourself and those you love, is a responsibility that brings worry no matter when you live. The way this world has of proving to be outside of our control (freak illnesses springing up and spreading like wild-fires, storms destroy houses and crops, jobs disappear, and loved ones die) – the out of control aspects of this world are terrifying no matter when you live.

This world is a scary place, it always has been, and it always will be this side of eternity. Fear of the out of my control parts of life is a universal experience.

So, there is this common need, second, consequently there is a desperate quest for peace. This world is full of people looking for peace. Whether you live in Greece in 500BC or America in 2020, true peace in this scary world is a commodity that is hard to come by, it's something we're willing to do just about anything to obtain.

For those ancient Athenians, in their culture, in their time, one of the seemingly best options available was the goddess Athena. In their quest for peace they were going to invest their time and their money and their energy in worshiping the goddess Athena, in the desperate hope that it would help their world be a little less scary.

As crazy as that decision may seem to us, stop and think about it. The Athenians were people who invested their time and money and energy in something, in the hope that it would give them peace.

Does that thought process sound at all familiar to you? Can you relate to that? Do you see people investing their time, and their money, and their energy in the hope that whatever they are investing in will make their world a little less scary?

The best option in our culture and time is no longer the goddess Athena, but the options are there, aren't they?

The 10 billion dollar self-help industry: the books, seminars, webinars, YouTube channels – all driven by the desire to grab a hold of life, maintain control and the corresponding feeling of peace.

The Athena of health: the fitness buff at the local gym, the foodie who obsess about what he puts in his body, the humanist whose faith is in modern science, who thinks that if we put the right people in the right places with the right dollars we can snag some peace and bring some control to those scary out of control things in life.

Our goddesses today are career or family – they are anything of this earth that your heart relies on to bring some semblance of peace into a scary world.

So, as crazy as the story of Athena is to us, we have this in common: a scary world and some options, where if we give enough of ourselves to them, we hope they might be able to bring us some peace of mind.

If we learn anything from the ancient story of Athena, let it be this: we would be wise to ask ourselves if we what we are hoping and investing in to bring peace of mind is actually capable of delivering that peace of mind.

Peter calls them cleverly invented stories in our second lesson for today – all of the clever solutions that humans have come up with over time to bring some feeling of peace to a scary world - cleverly invented stories that unfortunately can never deliver true, reliable, lasting peace.

Investing in the goddess Athena, investing in your health, investing in science, investing in your family, investing in your career – all of these things have proven to bring some level of the illusion of control, but anyone who has chased far enough down one of these rabbit holes will eventually find that real, reliable, lasting peace is not at the bottom. Unfortunately for many, that realization comes too late (like all those Greeks from 2500 years ago who died trusting in Athena to deliver peace).

Today we are gathered around a different solution to fear, a better solution to fear, because it's not one that humans came up with. It's not a cleverly invented story like Athena. It's not a cleverly invented dietary plan or scientific innovation.

It is the eyewitness accounts from people like Peter and Matthew, of the real history of a man named Jesus – a man who was much more than just a man, the very Son of God who embarked on a peace-bringing mission for restless people like us.

It is a peace bringing mission whose climax begins today.

The point of Transfiguration Sunday is this: when this world lets you down (and it will), when this world scares you (and it will), don't look to the Athenas of this world to solve this problem and give you peace. Don't rely on cleverly designed human solutions. Look to Jesus. Look to Jesus. Only he can give real, reliable, and lasting peace.

The purpose of this Transfiguration Sunday, the reason that Peter, James, and John got to have that mountain top experience, was so that we could know that there is only one plan of salvation in this world. There is only one place to look when this world gets tough and scary. There is only one message we need to hear when we are in doubt. And this plan, this place, this message comes straight from the only true God.

When we look to Jesus, and not this world, and we hear the words of God today, we know where to look for peace, **“This is my Son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him.”**

So, listen to Jesus. Don't listen to the world. Don't listen to your own sinful heart. Listen to Jesus.

Look to Jesus. He is offering you what no one and nothing else can. He is the only one who can look at you and mean it when he says, **“Don't be afraid”** because Jesus came to do away with the things that make this world scary in the first place.

This event, Transfiguration Sunday, took place right before the events of Holy Week. Luke says this about Jesus after he came down from this mountain, **“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”**

He resolutely set out for Jerusalem to die so that you would not have to fear.

He resolutely set out for Jerusalem to die so that you could have forgiveness for all the times you trusted in the things of this world for peace, rather than God.

He resolutely set out for Jerusalem so he could look at you and mean it when he says, **“Don't be afraid.”**

Do you see what makes Jesus different than Athena and every other false god this world offers? Jesus is offering you true peace today. Not peace bound to disappoint. Not peace that says try harder, give more and maybe you will be happy. Jesus is giving you peace that will last forever – because Jesus is telling you that everything that scares you he will take care of. And one day you will join him in heaven where fear will be nothing but a distant memory.

So look at Jesus this morning on the Mount of Transfiguration. Listen to Jesus this morning on the last Sunday before we begin Lent. We are about to enter a somber and quiet time of year in the church. We are about to spend 40 days focusing on all the ways we have failed God and the serious consequences for our sins. So look at Jesus one more time this morning and realize that no matter how dark this world gets, no matter how scary this world gets, you know and have true peace because Jesus won it for you. You have peace because the only true God came down to earth and he lived for you and he died for you so that he could look at you and say, **“Don't be afraid.”**

Amen.