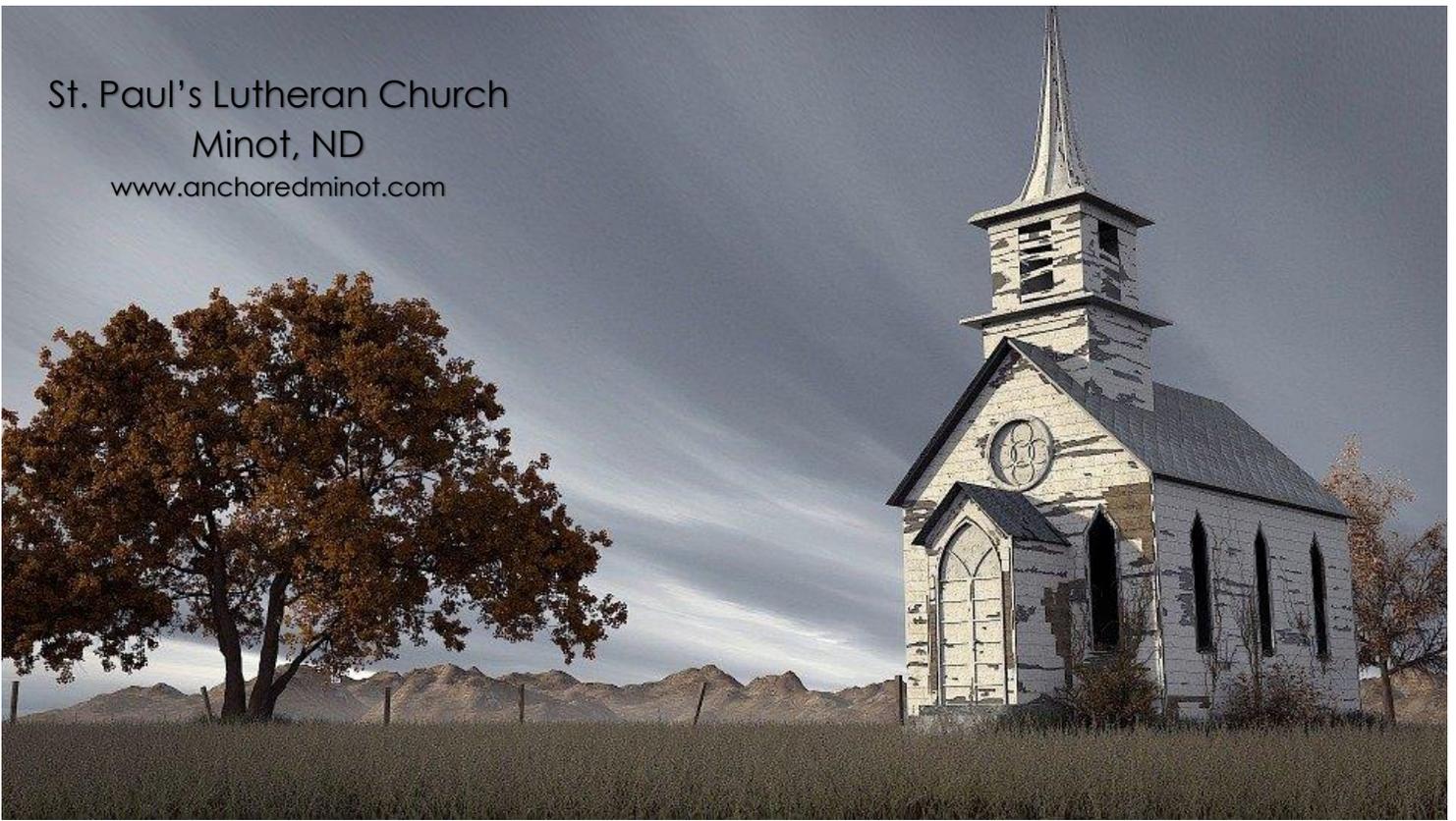


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflicting World

Acts 12:1-25

Herod was a wretched and pathetic authority figure. How do we know? In verse 2, Luke says that James was murdered. Now, keep in mind that Luke could've used the common word 'execute,' indicating that fair justice was done to a criminal. However, Luke does not use this term but uses the term 'murder.' Herod took James – he plucked him out with the purpose of slaying him and do away with him. This is hardly justice!

It is important to keep in mind that the premise of "innocent until proven guilty" is a Christian Ethic – derived from the 8th Commandment. We must always put the best construction – innocence – until one is proven otherwise guilty. Alas, bad rulers do not care about innocence until proven guilty. Bad rulers do not care about fair trials or due process. Mobs don't either. Going the way of power and immediate gratification, ruthless rulers and cowardly mobs want immediate blood.

This is why we should uphold the idea of blind justice.

The ancient Greeks held a deity called "Lady Justice."

Later on, in the 16th Century, statues of Lady Justice showed her wearing a blindfold. The blindfold represented impartiality. (*i.e., The blindfold represents that justice should be reached without coercion and applied without regard to the defendant's wealth, power, or status.*) And so, even though we reject the idea of Lady Justice as a goddess, we embrace the idea that justice should be blind to bribes and intimidation. Justice should be applied blindly without regard to wealth, power, and status. And so, we agree with the idea that one is innocent until proven guilty, and if one is to be charged as 'guilty,' it should happen with a blindfold on, not off.

To the point, though, civil magistrates exist to keep good order, protect the weak, and punish the ruthless. However, not all civil magistrates are like Lady Justice. Take Herod, for example. He did not operate from a sense of right and wrong, but instead, he discharged his duties in a way that fulfilled his ambitious, vain, and flattering desires. He sought not justice – blindly. But instead, his eyes were open to enacting justice based,

upon what would improve his popularity, his power and his status. Read verse 3, "After he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also."

We actually learn a lot from Herod. If we live our lives with an eye to what other people think, rather than what God says, we are, in essence, making God very small and our neighbor very big. Sigh, living a life where our neighbors are big and God is small, not only leads to unfaithfulness but to a life where one always is shifting, adjusting, and moving – like a chameleon to appease people. We call individuals who do this "people pleasers."

An old Franciscan Priest writes about this topic. He states, "Freedom in Christ produces a healthy independence from peer pressure, people-pleasing, and the bondage of human respect. The tyranny of public opinion can manipulate our lives. What will the neighbors think? What will my friends think? The expectations of others can exert a subtle but controlling pressure on our behavior. As a chameleon changes colors with the seasons, so the Christian who wants to be well thought of by everyone attunes and adapts to each new personality and situation. Without a stable and enduring self-image, a woman may offer radically different aspects of herself to different men; she may be pious with her pastor and seductive with the office manager. Depending upon company and circumstances, a man may be either a sweet-talking servant of God or a foulmouthed, bottom-pinching boor. Continuity of character is conspicuously absent in both sexes. Living by grace [though] inspires a growing consciousness that I what I am in the sight of Jesus and nothing more. It is His approval that counts."

In summary of the rest of Acts 12, we see how the Lord – through an angel – worked to deliver Peter from Herod's injustices. As is customary, the Lord works through angels to be messengers and protectors. As is shared with us in the book of Acts, angels are not visions but real beings. They are real beings. However, keep in mind that angels do not only protect and deliver messages; they also deliver the 'death ax.' They unleash diseases, calamity, and divine judgment. As is the case of Herod, divine judgment fell on Herod as he was eaten up (from within) by worms. (We would do well to dismiss the idea of angels being feminine beings playing harps while resting on fluffy clouds in heaven, for this is not a Biblical view of angels.)

