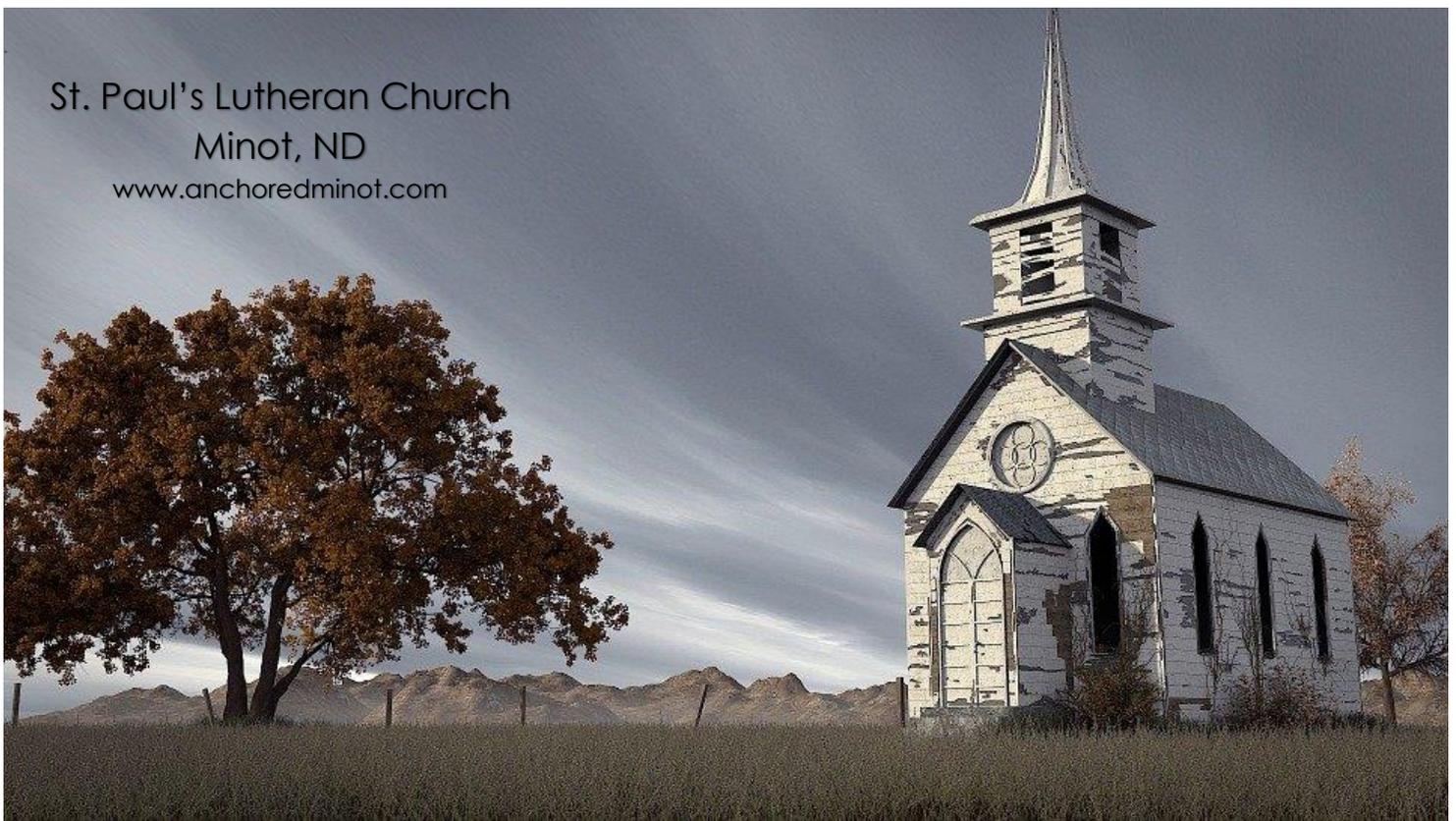


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflicting World Acts 13:1-52

In Acts 13, Barnabas and Paul are sent on their first missionary journey. Now, it would be easy to think that they were received with joy as they went out. However, as we look more closely at Acts 13, we see the exact opposite – conflict.

In the beginning portion of Acts 13, Paul and Barnabas encountered a Roman Governor named Sergius Paulus. Apparently, Sergius Paulus had some respect and connection to Judaism since he had a Jewish-magician as one of his advisers. The Jewish Magician was named Bar-Jesus. Long story short, Sergius Paulus wanted to hear more from Paul and Barnabas, but the Heretical Magician – Bar-Jesus – did not want this to happen. So, Bar-Jesus opposed Paul and Barnabas and tried to turn Sergius away from them. Bar-Jesus opposed the message of the Gospel.

Now, it is important to keep things in perspective. Sergius Paulus wanted to hear. His ears were open. Paul and Barnabas were open to proclaiming. But Bar-Jesus? He did not want this to happen. And so, Paul denounces the heretical trickster and tells him that he will be blinded. Paul is not gentle with Bar-Jesus but

firm, *“You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord?”*

What can we learn from this? First, it is not a surprise that Paul and Barnabas were opposed in their first missionary journey. The devil, world, and flesh hate the Gospel. When we confess the Gospel, we should expect blowback, not roses and cotton candy. Secondly, consider how Paul spoke to the evil heretic, Bar-Jesus. Paul was cutting and biting. He did not sugarcoat things. He called Bar-Jesus out for who he was. He called a spade – a spade. This is the exact thing that Jesus did in John 8:44 as well, *“You [Pharisees] belong to your father, the devil...”* But why the harsh words? Because harsh words are often needed for harsh situations. Consider Matthew 18:6 for a moment too. Jesus says, *“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”* In other words, if people, institutions, situations, and circumstances prevent people from hearing the Gospel, they are evil. And if they are evil, we should not pretend that they are good.

Imagine if Paul would have said to Bar-Jesus, *“Here here now, what you speak is probably true for you, which means we are probably saying the same thing, just using different words. Besides, we are religious people, and we should strive to get along. If people see us fighting, then they may be turned off from religion. Love must overcome hate.”*

Alas! Too often in Midwest culture, we suffer from chronic niceness. Chronic niceness does not allow us to call evil – evil. Mark this, we actually sin when we label something good that is in actuality evil. Yes, we are called to put the best construction on persons and things. But we are also called to be ‘truth speakers’ as Christians, which means that we must call out things as they really are. Too often, the church is kind to heretical wolves in the church when they should be cutting and biting. Oh, how pastors fail when they are gentle with wolves in the church when they should be harsh. Evil needs to be called out, especially when it is public. (*Note: there is a difference between shepherds, wolves, and sheep.*)

In the second portion of Acts, we see further opposition to Paul and Barnabas. As they would go on their missionary journeys, Paul and Barnabas would speak in the synagogues about Jesus. However, in Acts 13:45, a group of influential Jews became full of not-good-passion. Now, these influential Jews were not so much threatened by Paul and Barnabas – there was no clerical jealousy. But instead, the influential Jews were threatened and jealous by the large number of outsiders who suddenly came to share in the blessings.

Keep in mind that churches will often say, *“We want new people.”* However, the same people that often say this will grumble the most when new people come into the church. But why? Quite simply, if a parishioner thinks of the Gospel as *their personal possession*, they will be o.k. with new people only if the new people pay respect to their ‘Gospel.’ It is a way of maintaining a corrupt view of power and control in the church. But if a new person comes and shows respect to the Gospel without showing respect to the long-standing parishioner, the long-standing parishioner will feel a loss of control, envy, and jealousy. Oh, how we allow the world into the church. Remember, there is no such thing as power and control in the church for parishioners but only authority and servanthood. Furthermore, the Christian faith is a corporate faith – given by Christ and confessed by all. Everything we have is borrowed and shared from Christ. We are grafted into that which is outside of us – Christ. We are not grafted into each other or our tiny little versions of a so-called personalized Gospel.



