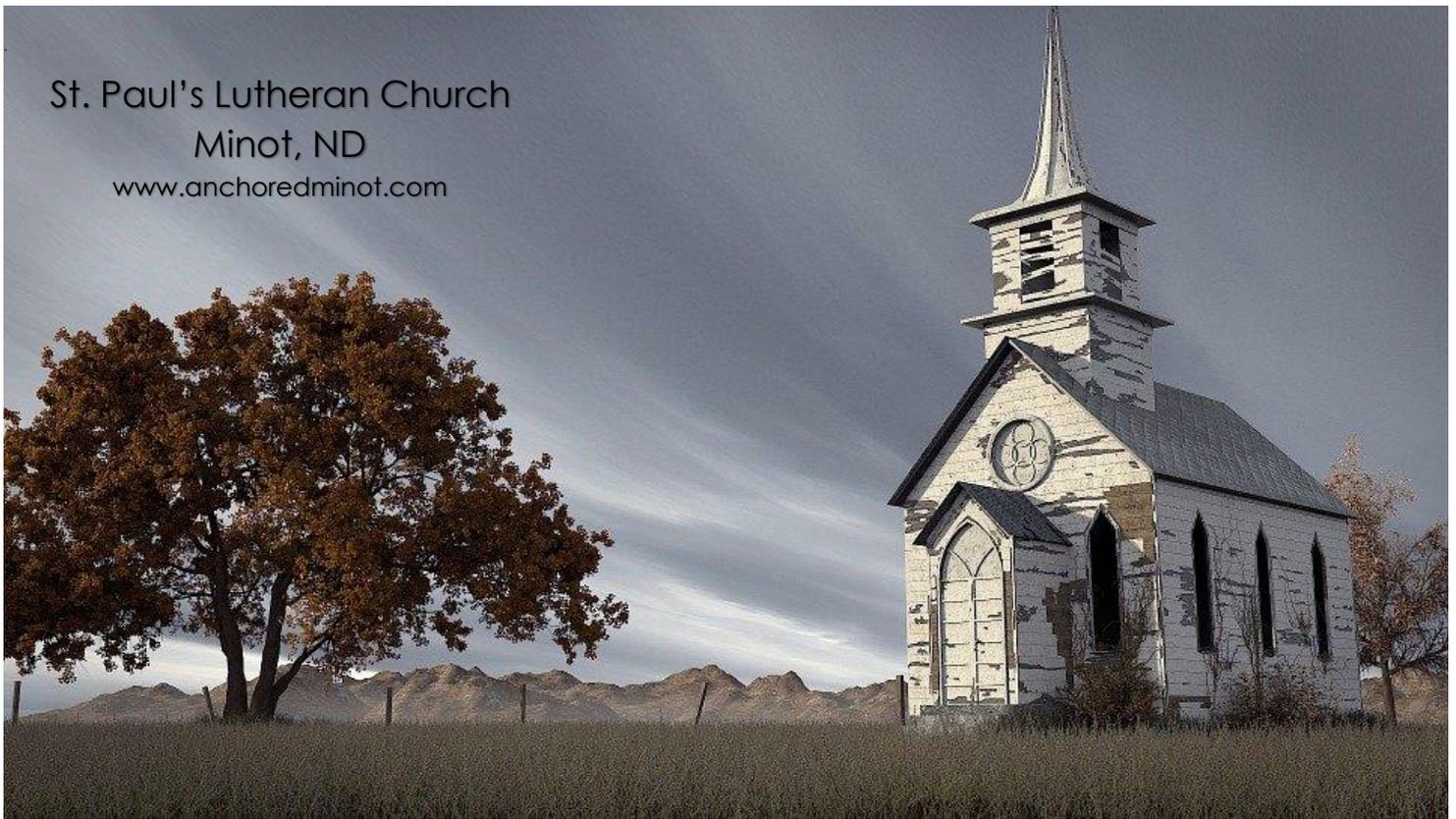


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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The Acts of the Apostles

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

Acts 14:1-7

C.F.W. Walther once said, "As soon as My [Jesus'] Word is proclaimed, men will divide into two camps: some will receive it with joy, others will be offended by it and will begin to hate and persecute those who receive." This is exactly what is happening in Acts 14. The reason why, though? Walther goes on to say, "the Church cannot be built up in peace; for it is located within the domain of the devil, who is the prince of this world. Accordingly, the Church has no choice but to be at war. It is *ecclesia militans*, the Church Militant, and will remain such until the blessed end. Wherever a Church is seen to be, not *ecclesia militans*, but *ecclesia quiescens*, a Church at ease, that -you may rely on it! - is a false Church."

What does this mean, though? It is impossible to escape this tension because the Word always confronts the sinful nature, false doctrine, and false gospels that arise in the Church. Thus, there will always be a degree of tension between the hearers of the Word and the Word itself. And regarding pastors? Does the pastor seek out tension? Does the pastor look for fights? Walther instructs pastors on this subject, saying, "If you wish to be faithful ministers of Christ, you cannot possibly become such without striving and fighting against false doctrines . . . In the view of the worldly men, your lot will not be particularly enviable. It is impossible for you to escape affliction if you wish to be faithful."

Regarding the specific conflict in Acts 14, though, it is interesting to see that the unbelieving Jews 'stirred up' and 'poisoned' the minds of some listening to Paul and Barnabas. From modern social psychologists, we learn that there is something called 'Crowd Psychology.' In other words, it has been shown over time that crowds of people are often manipulated, stirred, and poisoned by a leader(s). For example, a leader will over-simplify an issue towards a slanted perspective, usually to trigger an emotional response. The key is 'not' to get the crowd to think objectively but to think emotionally. And to get the crowd to be emotional, ideas and events need to be oversimplified for the purpose of fueling (*i.e., stirring, instigating, arousing*) an emotional response. Emotional responses of crowds cannot run on complex ideas but are stirred up and poisoned by simplified ideas that are usually twisted to appeal to the leader(s) overall goals. Once stirred up and poisoned, the crowd will become unhinged from objectivity and captured by raw emotions. And once grounded in unhinged emotions, the leader(s) can easily guide the crowd to drastic anarchy and ruthless actions. Take Acts 14:5, for example, "And when an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them..." The only way to quiet an emotionally unhinged crowd is, frankly, to disengage (14:6).