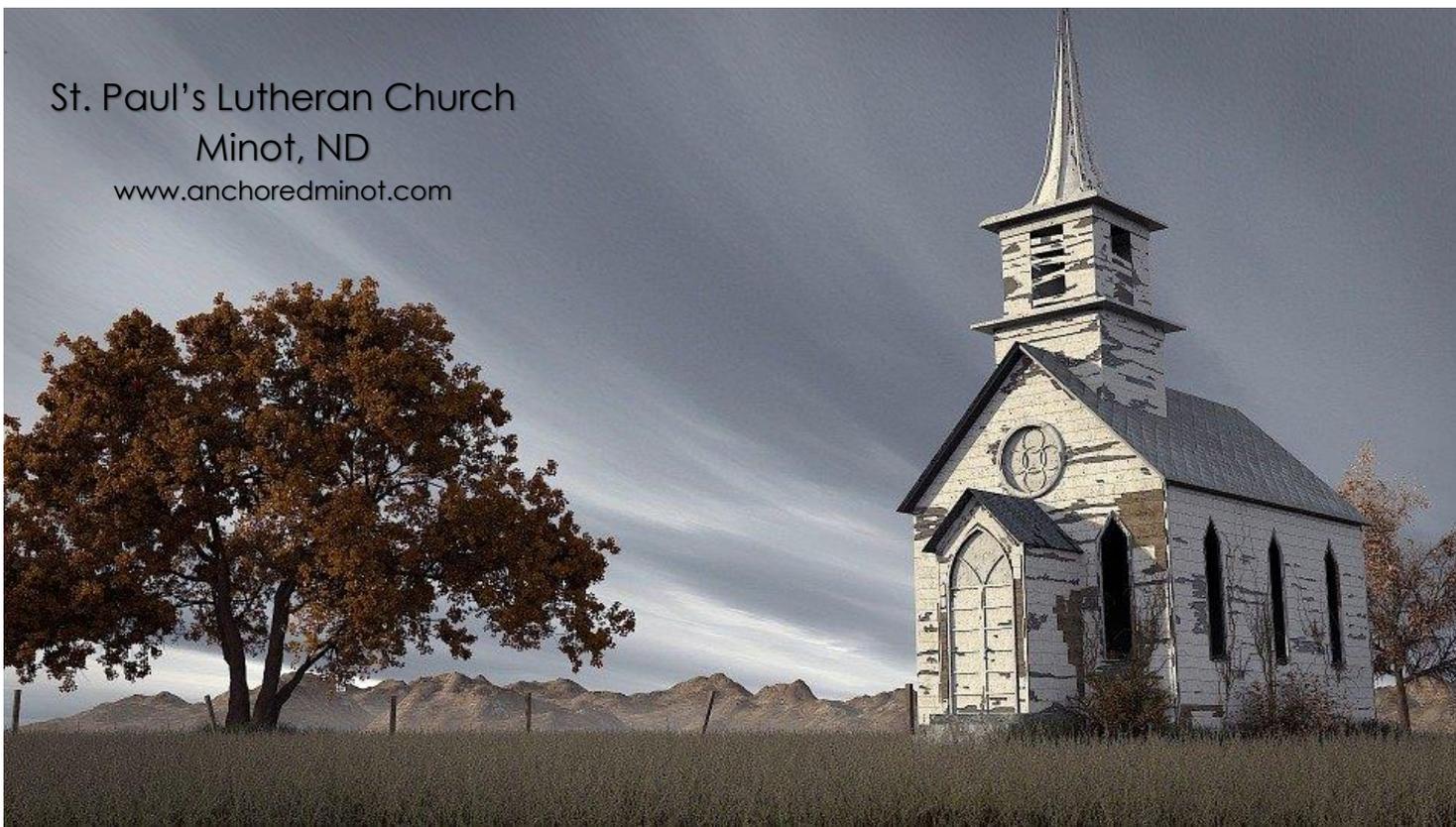


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
www.anchoredminot.com



The Acts of the Apostles

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

Acts 14:8-20

In Lystra, Paul healed a crippled man in the name of Jesus. But what happened after this great healing? Something quite tragic! The people went wild! They believed that Paul and Barnabas were gods in human flesh. In fact, it even sounds as if the people paraded to Paul and Barnabas with bulls, banners, and a ritual of sacrifice.

Now, consider the weight of this situation. Put yourself in Paul and Barnabas' place. The people of Lystra were essentially worshipping Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas had the full attention of the people and most surely had influence, power, and control over the people. Again, consider the weight of the situation. How would most people in society respond to such a situation?

Frankly, this is exactly what most people in society truly want. For example, as we look at society, the majority of the people are fighting to get to the top of the hill. The goal is to climb the ladder of success to accumulate power, wealth, influence, and control. In the business world, people work to become a partner of a business or the CEO. In communities, people strive to get on City Council, School Boards, and Task Forces to have influence and power. Even among stay-at-home-mothers, there is competition to climb the social status through the successes

of children in sports and school activities. The reason why? We want to be in the same place that Paul and Barnabas found themselves – above other people, being adored, and having control over the masses. In fact, is this not the goal of every cult leader? Is this not the goal of every corrupt politician? Is this not the goal of every tyrant?

In the church, pastors must guard themselves against this too. With the creation of social media, a new phenomenon has come about that is called the 'celebrity pastor.' Essentially, celebrity pastors are narcissistic individuals who aspire to be in the place of Paul and Barnabas. Here are some characteristics of a celebrity pastor:

1. They preach and teach not for the benefit of the flock but for the purpose of being praised by their hearers.
2. They are more concerned with 'their internet presence' and 'their careers' than the health of their church.
3. They are more concerned with their popularity among the masses than being faithful before God.
4. They think more highly of themselves than they ought to – putting themselves above the office they serve in.
5. They point inward to themselves, not outward to Christ.
6. Their trajectory is upward for personal glory, not downward to the flock for suffering.

How did Paul and Barnabas respond to the belief that they were divine beings? They were horrified! They tore their garments as a sign of distaste and disgust. They stopped the people. They went out to the crowd and cried out, *"We are not gods! We are men just like you, and we are here to bring you the good message of God."* In other words, Paul and Barnabas shared that they had the same powers, appetites, needs – and were subject to death – just like the people of Lystra. How tragic it is for the pastor who elevates himself above his sheep as if he is a little less mortal. How awful it is for the sheep to treat a pastor like he is immortal. Pastors are poor miserable damn sinners – just like everyone else.

But are not the sheep to show reverence to the pastor? Yes! But not to the pastor as a man but to the pastor within the office. And what is that office about? It is about the Word and Sacraments. And so, the public ministry of the pastor is not holier or better than the common state of being a Christian. It is instead a ministry of serving the Word and Sacraments.

And so, relating the reaction of Paul and Barnabas to the pastor, as a man, the pastor is quick to stand with his flock to confess sins. And within the office of pastor, he is quick to stand at the font and pronounce the forgiveness of sins in the stead and by the command of Jesus. The pastor is indeed a mortal. He is a poor miserable sinner placed into the office ministry to point himself and his church away from themselves to Christ.

Take a moment and consider what Paul and Barnabas said. Who did they point to? Who did they talk about? What did they say about themselves? What was the result (see verse 18)?

And so, what we can learn from these verses is that parishioners must guard themselves against making their pastors into idols. And pastors? They must preach in such a way as to prevent their parishioners from making the pastor into an idol. Shame on churches who cannot embrace a new pastor but are stuck in the past longing for the good ol' days when Rev. Bob was their pastor. Shame on pastors who did not push back against the flock – preventing their flock from putting too much stock in the man underneath the cloth. Shame on pastors who embrace celebrity status and don't fight back against it.

A brief mention: notice verses 19-20. The news of Paul and Barnabas traveled quickly. And the Jews who had previously persecuted Paul? They did not hesitate for a moment to travel to Lystra to raise up another mob. This time though, the mob actually stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, leaving him for dead. However, Paul arose after the beating and went to another city to preach Christ!

