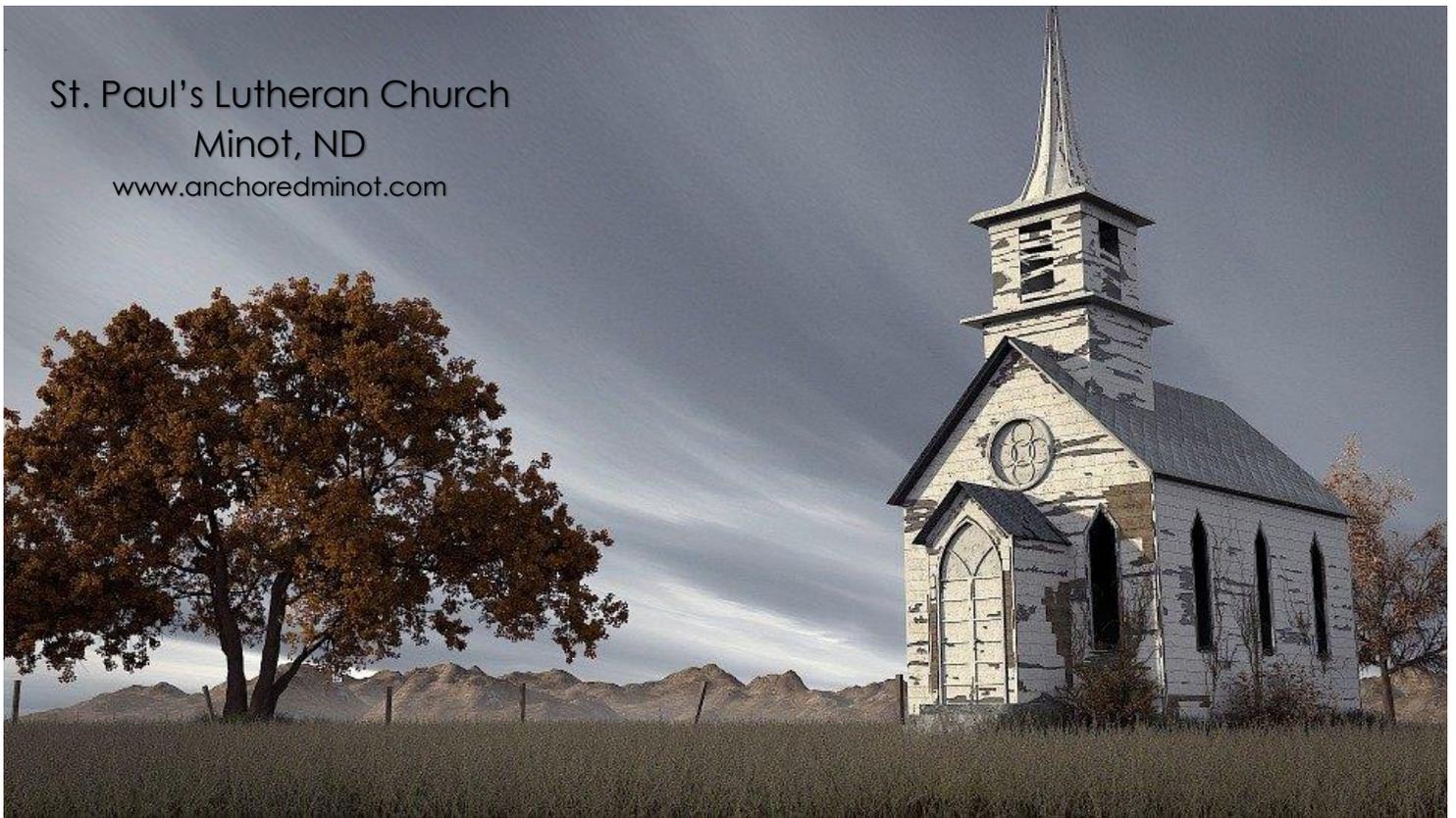


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# The Acts of the Apostles

The Ministry of the Gospel in a Messy Church & Conflictive World Acts 18:1-11

We should be getting used to the conflict in the Book of Acts. The Apostle Paul seems to certainly stir the pot. Again in 18:4, it says that *“he was debating in the synagogues every Sabbath.”* And it further says, *“he was trying to convince Jews and Greeks.”* In other words, Paul was debating (e.g., to argue, converse, and dispute) and convincing (e.g., to win favor, to persuade, and to convince through an argument).

Now, despite Paul’s most diligent conversing, it is worth noting that Paul was opposed as *a range in battle* and was dispised *through defaming, evil words, and hurled insults*. That is to say, they not only opposed Paul but blasphemed the Gospel.

And so, what did Paul do? Well, Paul shook the dust from his clothes and said, *“Have it your way, then. You’ve made your bed; now lie in it. From now on, I’m spending my time with the other nations.”* (paraphrase) To the point, if people oppose the Word of God or are bored with it, we shake the dust off and move on.

But does the present-day church have the courage to a

Act like Paul? As America becomes more pagan, does the American Church have the courage to shake off the dust and redirect to other people/nations?

Frankly, too much time in America is spent on entertaining goats and not feeding sheep. In other words, many goats (i.e., pagans) do not want the Word and do not want Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And the church? Instead of shaking dust off, the American Church tries to do everything possible to keep goats in the doors of the church, even if it means entertaining them. Alas, when the church entertains goats, it does not feed sheep. And when sheep are not fed, they begin to starve.

We must keep in mind that sheep hear the voice of the Shepherd, and they follow. Sheep will not follow a stranger’s voice but scatter. Properly speaking the voice of the church (via the pastor) is a voice that confesses the Word. And that is it.

What this means is that the success of a church does not rest on the number of people who come through the

doors. In fact, there are plenty of failing churches that have full pews and big budgets but no Word. Instead, they have goats being entertained into hell. Furthermore, a tiny church is not necessarily successful either because it is small. No! The goal and success of the church is a right confession! And when the Word is rightly confessed, some will hear it with joy, and others will scorn it.

Again, when goats scorn the Word, too often the church wastes its resources to keep these goats in the church – at the expense of neglecting the sheep. Evangelism is *not* manipulating, begging, or entertaining goats! Evangelism is preaching the Word to goats – so that they might become sheep. And pastoral care is not tickling the ears of goats but preaching the Word to sheep – so that sheep might be fed and strengthened.

Jesus talks much about shaking the dust off in the Gospels (See Mark 6:11 & Matthew 10:14). He calls the disciples to certainly go unto all nations. But when some nations/people do not receive, they are to move on. They are not to have communion with such foolish and obtuse people. But why? Again, it is an issue of good stewardship and judgment. When people don't receive the Gospel, the dust shall be shaken off as a sign of judgment, and then the Word must be confessed elsewhere. In the case of Paul, he left the synagogue and went to a house where a man named Crispus became a believer.

Now, considering all of this, it becomes problematic when churches engage in demographic studies. In other words, church planters will often conduct demographic studies in areas for the purpose of planting churches. While there is some wisdom to this (*i.e., knowing the age, income, the makeup of an area*), frankly, a demographic study is quite useless in determining whether certain people will receive the Gospel with joy or scorn it with unbelief. Think of it this way: if a church identifies its market segment through a demographic, and if the market segment (people) scorn the Word, what will the church resort to? Alas, it will look to entertain goats into the church! So, how should the church handle this then? The church shall confess, preach, and teach the Word – in season and out of season - to everyone. And if it is not received by a particular demographic segment, it does not matter. The church shakes the dust off and continues to proclaim to others that would listen. The church does not care about the makeup, status, sex, or income of its hearers. The church only cares about a right confession and ears that hear!

