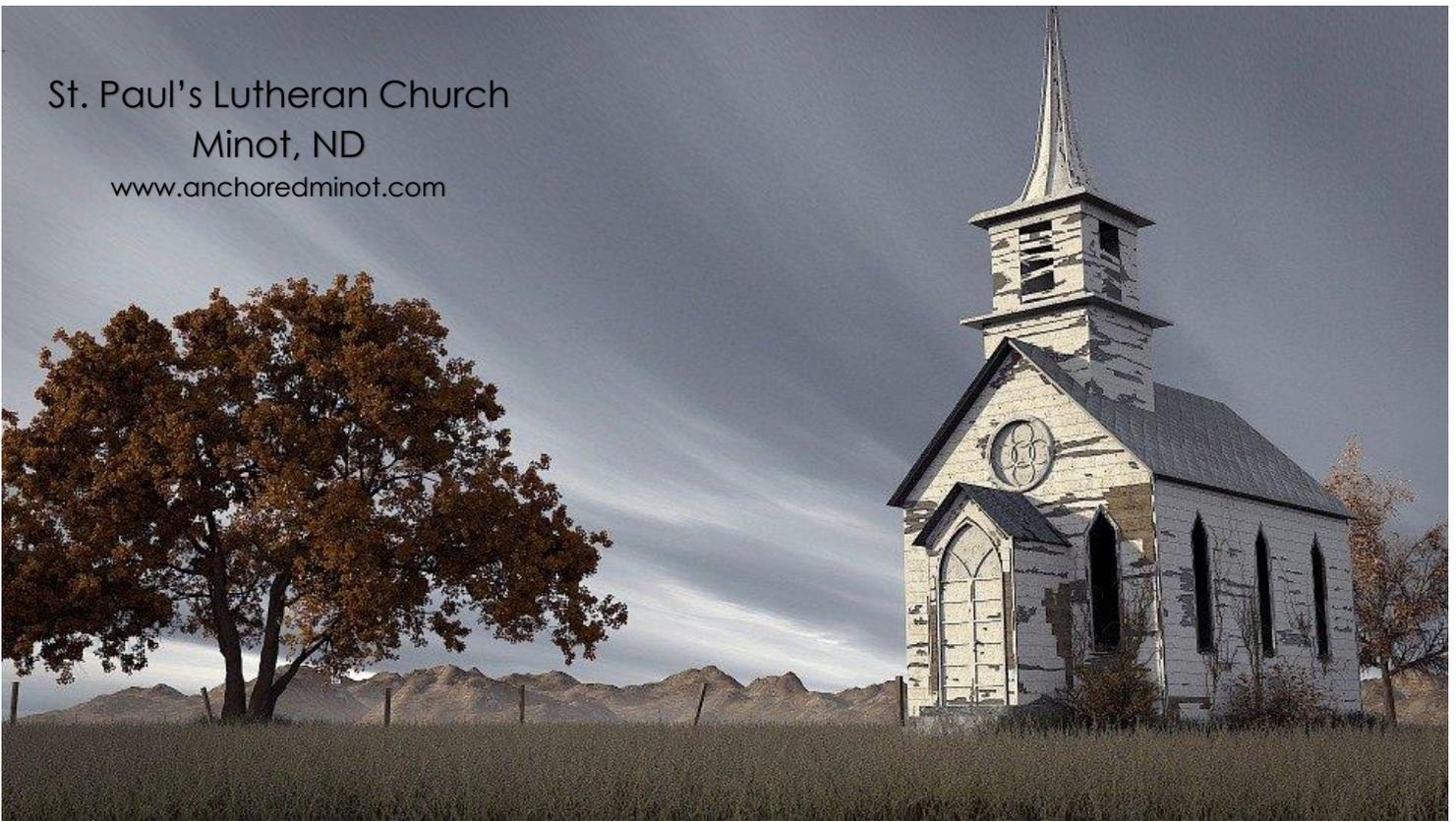


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
www.anchoredminot.com



The Acts of the Apostles

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

Acts 27:1-28:6

This larger portion of Acts describes the shipwreck event of Paul as he traveled to Italy. There are several important things that we must note.

First, take note of the pronoun shift at the beginning of Acts 27 – “we.” In other words, the use of the pronoun “we” shows us that Luke was with Paul on this trip to Italy.

Secondly, it is important to note all the nautical references such as: fathom, soundings, anchors, etc. In other words, such references show us not only the history of what happened to Paul but show us the ‘reality’ of the Bible. The Bible is not a myth or a fairy tale. It is grounded in real time and history, with real people, places, and things.

Thirdly, after the ship was wrecked everyone went upon dry ground, they encountered people on the island of Malta. These foreigners showed great kindness to Paul and the rest of the company. However, the natives possessed what can be classified as a *Theology of Glory*. This *Theology of Glory* is demonstrated in the actions of

Paul, when he was bitten by a viper while gathering a bundle of brushwood. Now, there is some significance to the native’s reaction that must be noted. First, they came to the conclusion that Paul must have had it coming (they deemed him as a murderer). In other words, Paul must have been a murderer at some point, and now ‘justice’ had finally caught up to him. Paul got what was coming! However, when Paul did not die, their thoughts swung to the other side – Paul must be a God! So, what is going on here?

As previously stated, the people of Malta were exhibiting a *Theology of Glory*. A *Theology of Glory* is a catchall for all theologies and religions of the world. A *Theology of Glory* is the natural default setting of human beings. And so, all of humanity interprets life through this *Theology of Glory*. In the case of Paul, he was bit by a snake, which is bad. And so, a *Theology of Glory* concludes: Paul must have done something bad to deserve a snake bite. However, since the poison did not kill Paul, Paul must be a god. For the inhabitants of Malta, justice ruled their thoughts – life for a life and what goes around, come around.

Much of life is governed by this kind of thinking. For example, Karma states that good intent and good deeds contribute to good Karma and happier rebirths. Another example would be the phrase, "He had it coming." Or, the phrase, "What goes around, comes around." In other words, a *Theology of Glory* focuses on the actions of mankind, and such actions can either advance or hinder a person. While it is true that bad actions will sometimes produce bad outcomes, it is not entirely true that this is the case all the time. In life, sometimes the bad guy gets the girl; sometimes the thief is never caught; sometimes people do get away with murder. Furthermore, while it is true that good actions will sometimes produce good outcomes, it is not entirely true that this is the case all the time. In life, sometimes doing the right thing has devastating consequences. The good guy does not always ride home on his horse into the sunset; sometimes, the good guy dies. And so forth!

And so, people who operate with a *Theology of Glory* will often do so naively (i.e., *Paul is a murderer...no, he is a god!*) However, what is called the *Theology of the Cross* will call a thing what it is and often does not speak beyond what it is able to. Furthermore, a *Theology of the Cross* typically addresses things through the lens of suffering – it does not try to solve or reconcile suffering. For example, if a person dies of a heart attack, we often look for a reason for why this is the case. If we can find a reason (e.g., *he was overweight, he had too much stress, it was hereditary*), then we can easily dismiss the suffering or at least reconcile the effects of suffering. However, if a person overcomes cancer, for example, we often will say, "he had mighty faith and perseverance – his prayers were bold, and his resolve was mighty!" Again, we will do this to 'solve' the problem of suffering – why some overcome, and others fall.

The *Theology of the Cross*, though, calls a thing as it is, "John's heart stopped – he's dead." Or, "John's cancer is in remission." A *Theology of the Cross* accepts the suffering. It has to because it is how we understand Jesus and the Christian faith. Think about it for a moment – Jesus was perfect and is God (good), yet He died (bad). We are not perfect, and we are not God (bad), yet we are declared righteous in Christ (good). Job was blameless (good), yet he lost everything (bad). Indeed, a *Theology of the Cross*, calls it as it is – Job was blameless, yet he suffered the loss of everything. However, a *Theology of Glory* will seek a way to reconcile the suffering – it will try and find ways in which it can pinpoint Job's suffering on something he said or did. A *Theology of .Glory* will seek to avoid suffering. It will see a way to blame the bad circumstance on something Job said or did. Alas, the *Theology of Glory* denies reality and evades the cross of Christ!

