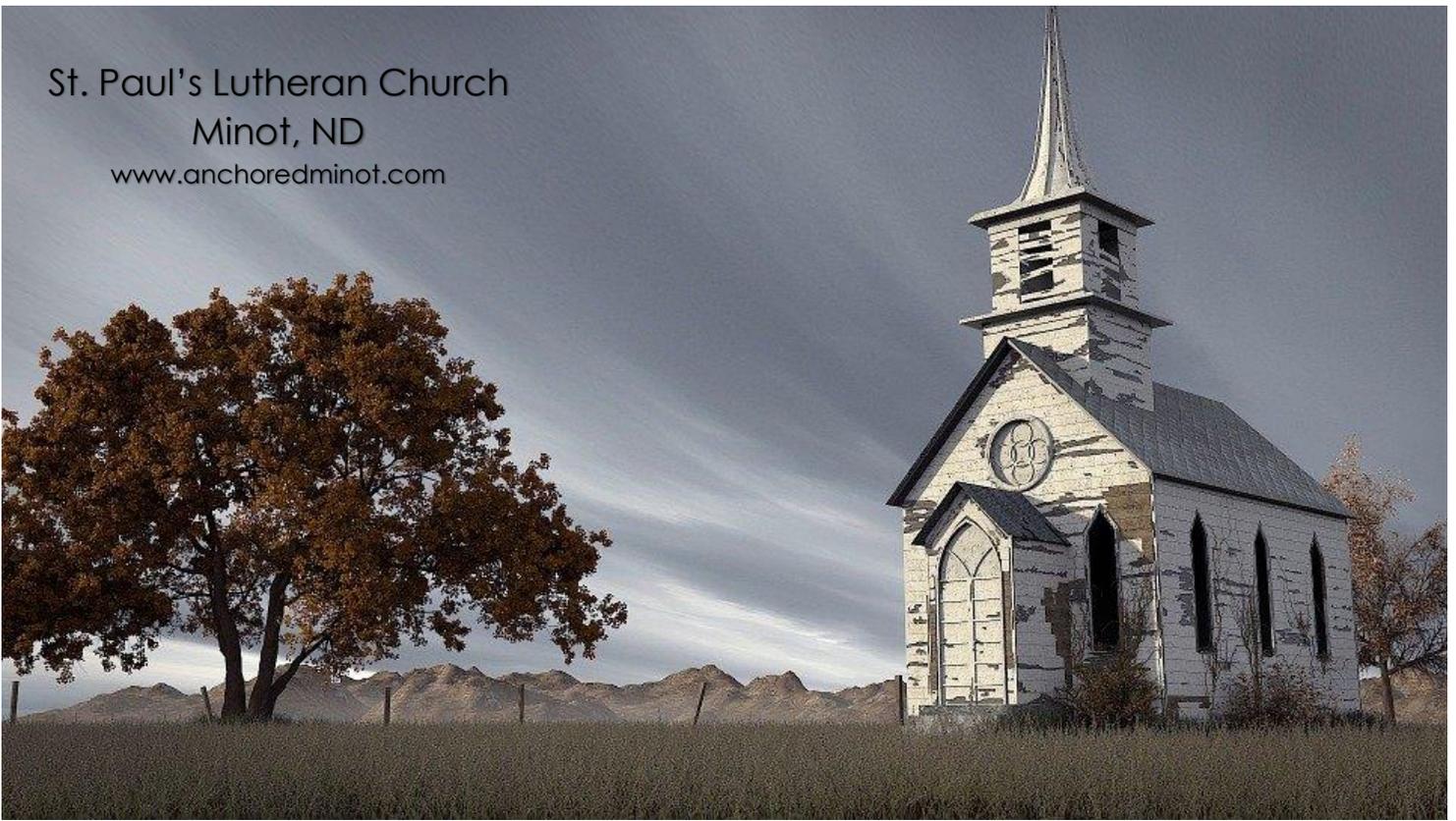


St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Minot, ND
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The Acts of the Apostles

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

Acts 8:9-24

In Acts chapter 8, we encounter a man named Simon. Before his conversion, Simon previously practiced magic. Now, this magic was not card tricks and illusions but magic within the realm of sorcery. Keep in mind that there is a difference between fun magic tricks and magic that conjures up demons, deals with the dead, and works in darkness. Make no mistake about it that there is a realm of darkness that surrounds sorcery – spells, curses, so-called talking to the dead, etc.

Now, as it is stated in the book of Acts, Simon was converted. There is no reason to believe that he was falsely converted. However, later on in the book of Acts, Peter and John encounter the Samaritans and lay their hands on them to receive the Holy Spirit. But when Simon saw this remarkable laying of hands upon the Samaritans, he resorted to his old ways and requested to purchase this gift to add to his old bag of tricks.

We must take a brief pause at this point to mention that Luke (the author of Acts) mentions the reception of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of the hands here in chapter 8, as well as in chapters 10 and 19. Contrary to the charismatics, the laying on of the hands is not the primary mode of a person receiving the Holy Spirit. That is to say; one cannot use a descriptive book like Acts to prescribe a method to the church for all times and all places – especially if it is not the norm.

But why does Luke mention the laying on of hands in the book of Acts? The laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit was done with the Samaritans, Gentiles, and the Disciples of John. It is as if the laying on of hands by the disciples was meant to highlight and show that these specific groups of people were acceptable to God. For example, the Jews did not like the Samaritans. But guess what? They were Christians. They had the

Holy Spirit. Peter and John specifically laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.... so, knock it off! They are Christians! Make sense? And so, there is no doubt in the mind of those who read the book of Acts that the Samaritans and Gentiles are included as Christians. They have the Holy Spirit!

Now, back to Simon. Simon reverted to his old ways when he wanted to purchase the Holy Spirit as if the Holy Spirit was some sort of mysterious effect that could be brought about by a secret magical art. Alas! Not only did Simon misunderstand the Holy Spirit, but he failed miserably by thinking he could harness, use, and purchase the things of God through money! This is where we get the term "simony" from.

Simony is a sin. It is a sin because the church is not for sale to the highest bidder. The church does not sell gifts of grace. Offices in the church are not positions of power but positions of service. In Medieval days, simony occurred when the church would sell ecclesiastical offices to those who would offer the most money. Today in the twenty-first century, simony occurs when the church gives favoritism to people based upon a person's worldly success, importance, net worth, and powerful connections, rather than a person's faithfulness to God. This is why it is good for the Pastor to be unaware of what people put into the offering plate. While faithful stewardship is good for a Pastor to teach, a Pastor should keep a distance from the church books. A pastor should never be afraid of offending a big giver or influential person from the pulpit – avoiding certain topics from the pulpit to make sure that the offering plates remain full. And for parishioners? It is good when money is given by parishioners as acts of worship. However, money should be given quietly, anonymously, and without the need to receive public accolades. Golden plates on donated items, names attached to scholarship funds, and flashing cash around to get one's own way, are very unhealthy practices in the church that can give way to simony. In a word, God does not play the games of favoritism. His church is not for sale. The Lord will never be hijacked by money and power. And stewardship? Like love, stewardship does its works secretly, without the intent to gain but to give. Faithful stewardship is not boastful, controlling, manipulative, etc. Church is not for sale!

