

## **“PEACEMAKING IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA**

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**Text for the Sermon: Acts 19:23-41**

### **Background/context.**

Is there a more contemporary text in Scripture? We live in a day of riots and mobs, of political turmoil, of great confusion, of crowds shouting down other crowds, people taking up sides, of things considered sacred being attacked, and growing anti-Christian sentiment.

Does it help you at all that in a time of great uncertainty, fear and anger, there is nothing new under the sun, that today's issues were first yesterday's issues? The Bible is real and relevant. It's wisdom is modern. It speaks to our needs and issues and fears.

Let me begin with a brief explanation of the context and background for our text.

Ephesus was a great city, a commercial, political and religious center in the Roman empire. It was on the Aegean Sea on the western edge of modern Turkey. You can visit the ruins of this city today. You can still sit in the 25,000 seat outdoor theater.

The great temple to Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. In Greek religion, Artemis was the goddess of hunting, nature and fertility. In Roman religion, Diana was her equivalent (in KJV).

It was a sensual cult, sexual immorality was a center piece. It was a religion of the flesh, it appealed to the baser appetites and attracted lots of visitors and tourists.

The silver shrines were small replicas of the goddess and her temple. They were like souvenirs for all the visitors to the great Artemis cult. Money and sex, the same idols we have today.

### **Acts 19:23-27**

**Acts 19:23** About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way.

A man named Demetrius who was a wealthy silversmith stirred up this conflict because his business was falling off. They say the most sensitive part of a man's anatomy is his wallet.

When you hit someone in their bank account or in their sinful pleasures you will get push back.

Demetrius was not making any theological defense of his god/goddess, he was making a financial defense of his business. He doesn't care until it hurts him financially. Then he acts like his goddess is being offended.

If Demetrius had not been losing money, he would have expressed no interest whatsoever in what Paul was saying or doing. He would have had no anxiety over the worship of Artemis. This is purely personal and selfish. He covers up his greed with the pretext of religion.

One man was able to stir up an entire city with his own selfish, greedy impulses and desires.

Later when Paul wrote to Ephesus he warned them about Satan's flaming darts and arrows by which he stirs up sin and evil. Here we see an example of what Paul was talking about. It is so easy for Satan to incite us to evil with the flaming arrows of lust and greed.

Why is it the Gospel is so opposed all over the world? What threat is it? The Gospel has always had fierce adversaries because all the desires of the flesh are hostile to God and His Word and His church.

Just try to slow the tide of abortion in our country and see how quickly you get a vitriolic response. Just try to put your finger in the dyke against sexual immorality and watch what kind of reaction you get.

We are warned here to not let desire for riches lead us into sin, greed, dishonest gain. We are also warned never underestimate people's ability to believe the absurd, the unreasonable, the false and foolish. There is nothing more plain and obvious and self-evident than that an object made by human hands is not a god.

Yet all of us are just as susceptible to believing lies, conspiracies, lies about abortion, about same-sex unions, living together. We believe our idols aren't really idols, yet they control us.

### **Acts 19:28-34**

Acts 19:28-29, 32 When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 So the city was filled with the confusion ... 32 and most of them did not know why they had come together.

It is an easy thing for Satan to stir up mobs, to incite violence, to create confusion and chaos, and get people to support bad causes and join in on conspiracies and make false accusations. And these are all instruments in God's hands for His glory and the good of His church and the advance of the Gospel.

Paul had no fear of the mob or violence. He was more than willing to defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ regardless of personal cost.

Are we willing to be as steadfast and earnest in the profession of our true faith as they are of their error?

### **Acts 19:35-41**

But God is in control, even over evil men and pagan politicians with mixed motives.

God uses a Roman pagan, a stickler for law and order, a person who doesn't want to attract the attention of Rome, to hold off the persecution. He has no interest in the Gospel, only in saving his neck.

This town-clerk was no friend of Paul, nor of the gospel he preached, yet his human prudence is made to serve the divine purpose. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19).

### **Application.**

I read this passage through several times asking what does this have to say to us. At a national or cultural level we can see lots of parallels and applications. It turns out our world is not so different from theirs. Some things never really change.

But what is there here for us? *Conflict is universal*. We all have disagreements, fights, disputes, differences, heated debates, arguments. Call them what you want we all have them and we all have lots of them in life, at home, at work, at school, at church, with friends, on social media.

On our vacation a topic of nearly every conversation was Covid and masks and vaccines.

In the Christian life, Christians should expect conflict just as Paul did. *First*, it is a result of our sinful nature and our fallenness. It is our default setting. Becoming a new person in Christ creates a lifelong conflict with our old nature.

*Second*, we should expect conflict because we have an enemy of our souls, Satan, who is constantly trying to discourage and defeat us, to divide us and get us denying Christ. Satan is constantly attacking Christian marriage, Christian parenting, Christian churches, all Christian relationships. Always, unrelenting, never ending.

What does this text teach us about how we deal with conflict in our relationships? How are we like the people in this passage and how can we do better? Is being a Christian a help to us, does it make a difference?

There are an abundance of tools here to help all of us if we have ears to hear and desire a better way of relationships and conflict resolution and peacemaking.

For the remainder of our time this morning I am going to take us through the Demetrius School of conflict resolution. He serves us well as a bad example of how not to do conflict. Write down these *ten bad ways to do your conflict*. These are the opposites of peacemaking. This is a case study on how not to fight fair.

### *Be defensive, feel threatened.*

Demetrius felt threatened, his livelihood, his professional status. He had no trust or faith in his god.

Feel threatened or attacked, protect yourself at all costs. Make excuses, blame someone or something else, cover up, throw it back on them. Refuse to consider any personal wrongdoing or that you might have contributed to the problem.

If you feel yourself becoming defensive, stop and be willing to consider you might be wrong.

***Be about winning the argument, not about coming to understanding.***

Demetrius was not interested in the truth, he was not interested in considering whether or not gods made by men's hands were gods or not. He was out to destroy the truth.

Don't be interested in the truth or what is just or unjust, right or wrong, just try to win.

If we are trying to win, we are losing finding understanding and peace and truth together.

***Be selfish, make it about you.***

Anger is a sign of fear. You are afraid of losing something, money, power, influence, control, friends, losing the argument.

Another word for this is idolatry, false worship, worshiping something we shouldn't, putting too much value and worth and importance on something, mainly ourselves.

If we have to attack others to protect ourselves we may be practicing a form of idolatry.

***Be subjective, assume the worst, jump to conclusions.***

Pretend to be psychic, able to read minds and assign motives. Make assumptions. Don't consider there might be another perspective.

Use tactics like criticism and blaming. Paul started it first so it is OK to return evil for evil.

If you don't think there could possibly be another side, another perspective you are arrogant.

***Be subversive, get others to agree with you (piling on).***

Demetrius brings others into his conflict, this is called piling on.

Claim everyone agrees with you. Gang up by saying your mother agrees with you, the pastor agrees with you, all your girlfriends agree with you. When you get a mob on your side you can intimidate, and overpower. Might makes right.

Don't keep your disagreements small, clean. Make them messy by involving lots of people.

If you have to appeal to others to win, you are not following Jesus' wisdom in Matthew 18.

***Be unreasonable, refuse to listen to reason, logic, objective facts. Raise your voice, yell.***

A pastor wrote on his sermon notes, "weak point, yell louder."

Included in this is interrupting or shouting down the other person, like they did with Alexander.

If you have to yell, you are losing. “Great is Artemis of Ephesians.”

***Let your emotions get the best of you and take over, be hasty and rash in your comments.***

Sarcasm, belittling, exaggerating. “All of Asia is turning to Paul.”

Seek more heat rather than more light. Put your emotions above your reason.

If you are doing that you are not following the wisdom of God’s Word.

**Ephesians 4:31-32** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

**James 1:19-20** Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

***Be duplicitous.***

Change your story or your line of attack when one path isn’t working. Be shifty. Saying different things to different people.

Demetrius started out talking about money and then shifted to talking about religion.

***Be foolish.***

Don’t know when to be silent, don’t listen to advice of others. Refuse to get help, don’t seek advice, don’t back off or be objective.

Don’t do what Paul did. His friends persuaded Paul not to enter in, but to be silent and he listened to them. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

***Neglect love, neglect your first love and neglect the love of one another.***

Love is the only oil that can keep our relationships running smoothly. Check your oil level regularly, keep love alive.

**Ephesians 5:1-2** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**I John 1:19-21** We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

**Romans 12:9-10** Let love be genuine. ... 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

**Colossians 3:13-14** ... [bear] with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, [forgive] each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

**John 15:13** Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

### **Conclusion.**

Have you ever done an autopsy of a fight, of one on your conflicts? Sometime later when you are calm and sane, examine a past fight, ask why it happen, what went wrong, what could have been done better? What were the triggers, what should be avoided? What can we learn about ourself? What rules did we break? How many of Demetrius' principles did you use? Which ones do you use most often?

If a town clerk, a pagan Roman bureaucrat can gain peace in a great conflict, then we who have Christ and the Holy Spirit certainly can.

Jesus went to the cross to buy and pay for our peace at great personal expense. He prayed for it and He paid for it. And He left His peace with us. We have His Spirit of peace.

**Matthew 5:9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Go thou and do likewise, and so show yourselves to be sons of God. Peace be with you.

**Prayer:** Jesus, while you were still with us on earth, you prayed for our peace and unity. You prayed that we would be one just as you and the Father are one. Jesus, pray for us again. By the power of your Word and Spirit, make us one even as you and the Father are now still one. Do this for the sake of your name and for the sake of your glory. Do this that the world may know that you have come to earth and that you still are powerfully present in your church. Make us one that Lynden might know and Whatcom County might know. Do this for the sake of the gospel, do this for the sake of the salvation of the lost in our community. Remove all that divides us and stirs up strife, forgive our great and many sins against you and each other, and make us instruments of peace. Come Holy Spirit, come Lord Jesus. Have mercy on us and save us. Hosanna is our cry. In your name. Amen.