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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
August 14, 2016  
13<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Matthew 13:31-35  
Hymns: 4; 261; 292:1-4; 800 (798:1-2)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 19:23-40

And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.

<sup>24</sup>For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen.

<sup>25</sup>He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. <sup>26</sup>Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. <sup>27</sup>So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship."

<sup>28</sup>Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup>So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. <sup>30</sup>And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him. <sup>31</sup>Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater. <sup>32</sup>Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. <sup>33</sup>And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the

people. <sup>34</sup> But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, “Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!”

<sup>35</sup> And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: “Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the *image* which fell down from Zeus? <sup>36</sup> Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. <sup>37</sup> For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. <sup>38</sup> Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. <sup>39</sup> But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. <sup>40</sup> For we are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Discerning Reality over Appearances.

This is what Christians struggle with in so many ways. It has always been that way. In Old Testament times some of the kings of Israel and Judah made alliances with foreign, and also very godless powers when the Lord had promised to protect them. The appearance of military might, a power that could be seen, seemed so much more real than the power of God which could not be seen when the armies lined up on the battle field. Even the idolatry into which they repeatedly fell was a matter of preferring appearances over reality. A dumb idol that couldn’t hear them or respond to them in any way appeared more real than the invisible, living God who created all things with the power of His word.

It is a continuing trial for children of God when the treasures and the pleasures of this present material world are weighed against the

hope of heaven. It is easier to feel secure with money in the bank than to trust the Lord who provides all things. And so it is easy for us to neglect things spiritual which we don't see with our eyes, and give our attention to cares and pleasures of this life which we do see. We know in our hearts that heaven is a far better place with treasures and pleasures forevermore without the sin and sorrow of this world, and yet we cling to this world.

So it follows that we may also find that the power and influence of this present world can be very intimidating for the child of God. We are here in this world and this world seems very real to us. So is good for us to be encouraged in --

### **THEME: Living as Christians in a Hostile Society**

One thing that the world is very good at is making an uproar. Our text records an example of --

#### **I. The World's Outcry against the Lord and His Truth.**

The events of our text took place after Paul had spent an extensive period of over two years teaching and preaching in the city of Ephesus. Hearing of Paul's preaching and the power of the gospel large numbers of people had turned away from the superstitions of their pagan beliefs and its magical powers. In response to the truth people had gathered a huge pile of pagan books on magical arts and had burned them.

Very likely it was news of this incident that instigated the riot that is recorded in our text. A silversmith named Demetrius started the uproar. His concern was that Paul with his preaching about Jesus could cut into their business, and so the prosperity of the local craftsmen would suffer. After all, the core of their business was the manufacture of shrines to the Greek god Artemis, also called Diana by the Romans. It was really about the money they might lose, but the craftsmen of Ephesus made it about a threat to their culture, and to their god. Their outcry caught on and large crowds of people began to shout out "**Great is Diana of the Ephesians.**" It turned into a mob, and as the commotion against the Way grew it turned into a riot.

Some of Paul's companions that had accompanied him from Macedonia were seized and taken into the public theater. Paul would have entered into the arena himself, but friends, who were also public officials, pleaded with Paul not to go. The situation had become too volatile. When one named Alexander attempted to address the mob it, the uproar only grew. They were not about to listen to any reason. They had no time for the truth. They simply screamed "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

That is the way of the world. As I was reading this it struck me how similar this was to the recent demonstrations against the new Ark exhibit and theme park down in Tennessee, and how outraged people were because this display would go against the false beliefs of most modern scientists and their doctrine of evolution!

The truth of God is often shouted down. It is called preposterous, ignorant and out of step with the rest of society. Still today it becomes evident that in the public forum the world's answer to the truth of God's Word is to try to shout it down. While the world claims to be tolerant of all views, it becomes evident that doesn't include the truth of God's Word. The Word is found too repulsive to them; so threatening that it is intolerable and to be shouted down. Maybe the cry today isn't "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," but "great are the accomplishments and wisdom of science," or "great is the freedom to live in open immorality." The truth is found to be so threatening that people lose control at times and the result can become tense to say the least. Things get out of control. Or so they appear.

Yes, we are back to our message for the day. Appearances versus reality, and appearances can be deceiving.

In Ephesus, things suddenly changed and it was due to --

## **II. The Lord's Intervention.**

This lesson is particularly important for us today. In the accounts of the work of the prophets and the apostles we often read of great and wondrous miracles through which the Lord intervened in a dramatic way and delivered His people. You can go back as far as Noah and the ark or Moses at the Red Sea, and learn of how God delivers with a mighty hand. We don't read about such a great

miracle in our text. All we read about is the city clerk quieting the crowd and reminding them that what they all know is true, their idol Diana is indeed a great goddess, but since the men they brought to the city square had not robbed their temples or blasphemed their great goddess, they should be quiet and not do anything rash or impulsive. If they weren't careful, he warned, they could get in trouble with Rome for having such an unlawful assembly. Rome might conclude that they couldn't be trusted to keep the peace. One might say that this faithful follower of a dumb idol had managed to speak some sense into the people and all was resolved without any need to bother the Lord with it.

You couldn't be more wrong. What we learn here is exactly how the Lord works in this world for the preservation of His Church and the advancement of His gospel. Yes, even when this public official was acting out of a selfish motives, to protect his job, his position with Rome, and the city's favorable standing with Rome, the Lord used this man to serve the Lord's higher purpose. God still directs all things for the good of His Church. Jesus reigns in heaven above, and even when we forget that, it remains true. Even when it doesn't appear that way to us, Jesus is still the One in control. Just as the intervention of the city clerk was used by the Lord to serve His purpose of protecting Paul and his companions that day in Ephesus, so the Lord can and does still use public officials and other normal everyday events and processes to preserve and protect His Church today, even when that is not people's intent.

What is God's goal? What is the Lord's agenda? It is the salvation of souls. Jesus understood His Father's hand in the affairs of this world. Of course He did. Jesus was at the very heart of the God's intervention in this world. God sent His only begotten Son into the world, not to condemn the world but at the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:17) Jesus saw how important it was for this truth to be presented. On the night before Jesus died --

**John 17:1-3** "Jesus ... lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, <sup>2</sup>as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

<sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

That intervention by God into world history set the tone and the assurance for us of God’s intervention into the affairs of our country and our own individual lives. The Lord Jesus as our risen Savior has all authority entrusted to Him in heaven and on earth. It is His will that this gospel of God’s love and forgiveness should continue to go forth and be shared with sinners in all the world. It is His purpose that by this truth all nations should know the only true God because they have come to know and believe that Jesus Christ was sent to save us from our sin.

So when the world is in an uproar against the Church, against the truth of the God’s Word, know that the Lord remains in control. He will preserve His truth. He will preserve His Church. He will preserve and protect you from every evil. This has been true for all time, and shall continue to be true to the end of the world.

**AMEN.**

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.