

Reading: Acts 13:1-12. H No 248 For my sake and the gospel's go.

Sermon: In the name of the F S And H S. In our reading this morning Luke reports a time when the Gospel triumphs over the forces of evil in the 1st century the Roman Empire, particularly in Cyprus. Evangelical churches in the USA believe and stated that we live in very evil days in the 21st century. It seems we hear more about the things that are in conflict with a Christian worldview. We live in days where many anti-Christ's, flex their arms as if to cause, Christians to be afraid. We need this kind of passage to focus on, because we need to be reminded, that God will win this cosmic battle. The devil is seeking to destroy our Christian Heritage proactively. He really doesn't care how he does it as long as he is successful. He can use the influence of atheists, agnostics, and political powers just as he used Elymas the magician at Paphos. He was trying to control people with his magic and opposed the Gospel message when Paul was preaching about Christ in Cyprus. Paul believed that Gospel message should be preached to set people free from bondage and outside the walls, because that is the main business of the church. Some years ago, an article talked about, how some people didn't understand what business they were in. For example, the railroad people didn't understand that they were in the transportation business. Had they realised it, they would have invested in the airplane. The telegraph people failed to realise that they were in the communications business, they could have created mobiles and social media. Some would say that the church of Christ should be in the business of care, of its members to visit the sick and pray with them, to take care of people at important transitions in life, such as marriage, childbirth, baptism and death. It's here to provide guidance and comfort for people at important times. No doubt, these are all functions of the church. But Paul would argue that these functions are not the only business of the church, and if we start acting as if they were, we will miss our main business. We are always in danger of slipping into a maintenance mentality in the church, where we focus on maintaining our religious club and preserving its sacred traditions, and we forget about the lost people, who are prodigal sons and daughters of God. "We somehow think that the Church is here for us; we forget that we are the Church of Christ, and we're here for the world." "The book of Acts is a constant reminder, that we are not mere maintenance Christianity, but a movement, unfortunately, we are becoming a monument. The church of Christ should respond to the inclusion of Gentiles and non believers into the Christian faith.

Paul entered into dialogue with the evil magician in Cypruss, because both he, and the church in Jerusalem were open to what the Holy Spirit was doing, and because they submitted to the word of God, they were able to preach the Gospel openly and publicly in a powerful way. I think we also can draw lessons from this passage both as a church, and also as individuals on how we can help break down the barriers, that can divide people and stand against the evil powers around us, at the same time we have to follow the example of our Lord JC & simply to obey one command, and that is to love people, the way God loves us. If we are committed to living this way, not only will it prevent barriers, being erected in the first place, but it will help break down those we find, just as God has broken down the barriers and walls that once separated us from him. St Paul said, my own hands ministered to my necessities, and to those who were with me.'Paul's business and money-earning work was, an effort to build up the community economically using his skills and possessions for the sake of the Mission. Paul is not claiming any higher status arising from his apostolic position, but rather is "stepping down the social ladder for the sake of Christ and common people." In other words, it is not the case that Paul engages in tent making as a necessity, so that he can do his "real job" of preaching the Gospel. Instead, Paul's varieties of work in business, in tent making workshops, marketplaces, synagogues, lecture halls, and even in prisons are all, forms of witness of Christ. In any of these contexts, Paul participates in God's resto-rative project, Paul had his new identity in Christ for the sake of God's glory and out of love for his neighbours. Even when he is being

transported across the sea as a prisoner, he employs his gifts of leadership and encouragement to guide the soldiers and sailors holding him captive to safety during a severe storm and shared the Gospel with them as we can see in Acts 27:27-38. If he had not had the gift, of being a preacher and apostle, he would still have been a witness to Christ simply by the way he engaged, in business of making tents, toiling for the sake of the community, and working for the good of others in all situations. Because of Paul's business & profession "Tent making" has become a common metaphor for Christians who engage in a money-earning profession as a means to support what is often called "professional ministry." Paul's example shows that all aspects of human life should be a seamless witness. There is little room to draw distinctions between "professional ministry" and other forms of witness that congregation members do. According to Acts of the Apostles, Christians actually have only one vocation, one business and that is witnessing to the gospel & Glorifying God. In 2017 we need to identify what is the main task & business of our church, individually, collectively and how can we be effective, in our community services, in our parish, through our car boot sale, street pastors and other kinds of out reach, as Paul was effective in Cyprus, and other parts of the Roman Empire. Let's ask God to help our efforts and bring more people into the Kingdom of God as we have a few moments of silent reflection.