

The Day the Christian Church Caused a Riot

By

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It happened in Ephesus. It was caused by the bold expansion of the Christian Church. They were not the ones rioting. They were proclaiming the Good News. It was recorded in Acts 19:23-41.

It is the story of the riot in Ephesus when the impact of sharing of the Good News of Jesus disrupted the local economic base that sold silver shrines and other items for the worship of the Goddess Artemis. Ephesus was the epicenter of the worship of Artemis and the location of the Temple of Artemis. This temple was later declared one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Today all that remains is the foundation and one restored column.

The Apostle Paul and his supporters were the problem. Through the leadership of God's Holy Spirit they proclaimed the Good News with boldness. The Good News positively impacted many people. Because their lives were transformed by God, the people changed how they lived and what they bought. They no longer needed the crutch of idolatry with an imaginary goddess. They did not need the products of the craftsmen.

They no longer bought swag, souvenirs, and idols they could see. They were transformed by the Living Word of God who they could not see yet experienced in multiple ways. They were embraced by the stories of Jesus of Nazareth. They were made new by their faith in Jesus the Christ and put away old things.

The new Christians disrupted the economic base of Ephesus. The agitator of the riot was Demetrius, a silversmith. He rounded up other producers of the swag, souvenirs, and idols. He incited a riot. The mob entered the local stadium – the seat of community dialogue, performance, and governance.

The Apostle Paul wanted to confront them in the stadium, but the Christian leaders of Ephesus persuaded him not to go, not only for his safety, but to keep sharing a bold witness. Eventually a city leader calmed the mob.

What are the implications of the Ephesus riot for us today? First, we should never underestimate the power of the Good News to transform the lives of individuals. Second, even more, we should never underestimate the power of the Good News to transform our community, our country, and the world. The Good News can make everyone and everything more loving and just.

During the current time of pandemic, out of various motivations and personal beliefs, we have seen people demonstrate, march, riot, protest, cheat to get a vaccine, and participate in an insurrection. While many of these efforts have involved people who literally and figuratively waved the flag of Christianity, their message was seldom the pure, unadulterated one of the unconditional love of God through Jesus Christ. Too often it was an adulterated form of American Civil Religion.

There is power in the name of our Lord. I yearn for the power of the Good News of Jesus Christ to be so strong through the life and witness of each and every Christian believer and congregation that our community, our country, and our world are transformed by the Good News.

Let us stay away from the stadium – as did the Apostle Paul – and keep our focus on sharing the unconditional love of God through Jesus Christ. Let us not do this passively. Let us do this boldly as our commitment to fulfill the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment.

We must allow God's Holy Spirit to change people from the inside out for an eternity, rather than demand and legislate that people be changed from the outside, yet their hearts too often remain the same.

What will you and your congregation do during 2021 that is so radically Christian that unbelievers will want to riot against it because it disrupts many lives with the transforming love of God through Jesus Christ?

Think of three bold actions you should take, and three bold actions you congregation should take during 2021 that transforms the lives of people, our community, our nation, and God's world.