

Here in America when we are dissatisfied, we express our dissatisfaction in a variety of ways. If we feel that receive poor service at a restaurant, we might not leave a tip; If we feel the city is not clearing the streets fast enough, some folks write a letter to the editor; If politics is driving us crazy, we may place a witty bumper sticker on our car, but one of the favorite ways we as Americans have expressed our dissatisfaction is with the good old fashioned, boycott.

Probably our earliest boycott was started with the Boston Tea Party, which in the end, and that needed up being very effective didn't it? Remember for a while there in the 1970s and 1980s boycotts became super popular here in America. Every where you turned there seemed to be a boycott.

We all remember huge boycotts, like the United States boycott of the Moscow Summer Olympics in 1980 and we may not be aware of smaller boycotts like the boycott against Carl's Jr burger chain about the same time.

Most of the boycotts we think of are intentional boycotts where someone organizes the boycott like the Montgomery public bus boycott in 1955 started by Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat, which was quite successful, or we may remember the Baptist boycott of Disney world in 1997, which wasn't very effective. But, you know, most boycotts are not intentional.

Most boycotts are unintentional and are simply the result of a change of human behavior. Folks stop going to a restaurant or stop buying a particular brand of ice cream; The restaurant closes, and the store stops carrying the slow selling ice cream and replaces one ice cream brand with another ice cream brand.

Remember that candy bar Bit-O-Honey? I used to love those as a kid. I would buy one every chance I could and slowly devour it. You can't eat them fast. I think I lost a couple of teeth eating those things as a kid. Good luck finding a Bit-O-Honey candy bar now. Over the years people just like you and me, instituted an unintentional boycott on the lovely Bit-O-Honey candy bar and eventually it was replaced by some lesser quality candy in supermarkets all over these United States.

This is what we see happening in our Scripture this morning. Over time more and more people are becoming Christians in the city of Ephesus and the surrounding area. As a

result of all these people converting to Christ, the Temple of Artemis was suffered financially and so did the merchants attached to the Temple of Artemis.

Here we see that the success of the church brings opposition to the church. This passage we are looking at today is not so much about idolatry, as it is about attacks against the kingdom of God and, the response to those attacks against the kingdom of God.

Everything is going well for the church in Ephesus and it is growing like a weed. Even though Ephesus is the center of the occult for Asia, Christianity is taking hold. Historically, we see that even in the most difficult area of spiritual opposition, Christ will overcome.

This success the church enjoys brings with it, problems. This is always how it is in Christianity. Success will always bring problems in our Christian walk. The more success we have, the more potential problems we will have. But, remember the solution to those problems is not human based, but Holy Spirit based.....so though problems and difficulties may mount, our burden becomes lighter because we have the Holy Spirit to help us deal with them.

The reason that there is a problem for the church in Ephesus is simple math. So let's do the math. The more Christianity takes hold of people in Ephesus, the less the occult has ahold of those same people. The less people the occult has ahold of, the less people go to occult sites and occult stores. The less people go to the Temple of Artemis the less tchotchkes they will buy from the Temple gift shops. Then eventually, economics kick in.

The Temple of Artemis wasn't just a regular temple. It was also a type of ancient bank. Now, how this temple bank operated, the details are sketchy, but somehow the Temple of Artemis acted as a Bank and people from all over the known world deposited funds there. Inscriptions have been found in Ephesus dating back to 44 A.D., a little before Paul arrived in town. These inscriptions tells us that the local proconsul had to be brought in because of some "improprieties" that were found in the books of the temple. Temple monies were being funneled to private individuals - it's like an ancient form of the Madoff banking scandal.

In Ephesus, politics, religion, economics, and local civic pride were heavily intertwined even inseparable from the worship at the Temple of Artemis. This money scandal at the

temple had not only hurt the pride of those directly connected to the temple, but it also had hurt their pocketbooks. So before Paul even arrives with Christianity, those connected to the Temple of Artemis are financially in trouble.

In comes Paul. Upon conversion to Christ, Christians would no longer have anything to do with Artemis or here temple. Understand, this is a new thing. Gentiles of the day would easily change worship and devotion from one god to another, but until Christianity arrives, gentiles would serve many gods. They would take on a new god, but still serve the old gods. Now with Christianity, converts would serve Christ alone and sever any connections with other gods or other religions. This new 'social' attribute of Christians was killing the pagan temple business.

Artemis is a fertility God and though there were many prostitutes at the Temple of Artemis, Artemis was not an erotic god. Instead, Artemis was all about prosperity and productivity. The concept was that a devotee would make offerings to Artemis with the result being that their fields and or businesses would be prosperous. The proof that this was true, the proof that an offering to Artemis would bring prosperity? Hey, the Temple of Artemis is so prosperous - its a bank! What more proof do you need? Everyone was convinced that making an offering to Artemis worked, they had the proof positive with the prosperous temple before them. All they had to do was go to the Temple and hey could see the proof of the prosperity the Temple produced.

Again, reminiscent of our old friend Madoff.

Now remember, the Temple of Artemis is part of the occult that the people of the city are all wrapped up in. I want us to note that Paul and the church do not bring the occult down by directly attacking the occult. Paul and the church do not directly attack the Temple of Artemis do they? Paul and the church serve Jesus. They had their priorities straight.

So let's do some priorities for our Christian life this morning.....Ready? If your taking notes, you may want to write these down.

Priority number one - Serve Jesus.

Priority number two - See priority number one.

The god Artemis was so popular and so tied into civic life that one whole month was set aside for festival in honor of the god. The month of the festival was called Artemisium. Sounds more like some kind of a colon disorder rather than a month of festivities if you ask me.

The Temple of Artemis in Paul's day was the second Temple of Artemis. The first one was burned down in 356 BC by a man named Herostratus. Herostratus said he burned the temple because he wanted to be remembered. I guess his plan worked. The second Temple of Artemis was a phenomenal structure, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. All this to say that Artemis was probably the most popular and the most worshiped god of the day - and even so, Artemis was going broke.

It was going broke not because of a direct attack upon it, it was going broke out of neglect.....

A silversmith named Demetrius does the math and calls together all those in related trades, in other words, all those who create items for the Temple of Artemis.

Here in Anchorage we have a series of gift shops downtown where tourists browse to bring home memories from their visit to Alaska. If we are honest here, most of the stuff in those shops is just junk, they are little tchotchkes (pronounced tchot-ski-s, say the t and the ch as one sound), you know, that's Yiddish for the little knick knacks that populate the shelves of our home, useless stuff.

These people who are gathered to riot, they literally make the little tchotchkes. Its actually kind of funny here, that the people who come out against Christianity are not the politicians, or the educated, or the wealthy or even the business community, its the tchotchke makers. The people who make knick knacks.

In our day it would be the guy who makes the cheap key chain stamped "Alaska," or the guy who makes pencils and pens stamped "Alaska," or the piles and piles of junk we see those stores - these are the people who are about to riot. It is not the gift shop owners, but the folks who make the trinkets.

Many items could be purchased in honor of Artemis. Archeologists find little pocket gods all over the ancient biblical world. These pocket gods were about the size of one of those little green army men we used to play with as kids. They were usually made out of brass and sometimes plated with silver or gold. The idea was that you could take your favorite god with you wherever you went for protection. They believed that somehow this little pocket god would protect them.

The main tchotchke that was produced for Artemis was a tiny little replica of the Temple of Artemis, within the tiny little replica of the temple of Artemis was an even a tinier little replica of the god Artemis, sitting on her throne in the temple, just like the real temple, but way smaller. Most of these little temples that are found by archeologists are made out of terra cotta, but every once in a while one made out of silver is found also. So Demetrius makes not just tchotchkes, like the terra cotta miniature temple, but upscale tchotchkes, miniature temples out of silver. In other words, Demetrius is on the top end of the tchotchke makers.

Ok, Demetrius gathers all these people together in the city amphitheater, which sat over 25,000 people and notice what he says about Paul, starting in verse 25, “Men, you know we receive a good income from this business. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that man-made gods are no gods at all. 27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty.”

The problem is that Paul says, “man-made gods are no gods at all.”

Stop right there, and back up a bit.

Hebrew uses several words for the word idol used to describe the tchotchkes Demetrius creates like, a likeness; or, something carved or made; or, good for nothing. But in the NT, the Greek uses the word “eidolon” which we translate into English as “idol.” It generally is used to refer to vision or sight, it translates literally, “the way I see things.”

I think this is helpful for us as we try to understand ancient idolatry. For us, a way to understand idolatry, is, building one's own god, or creating a god that makes sense to me.

True story. At a particular Christian High School for girls in NYC, the most popular class offered is a class on world religions. The most popular. The teacher goes through the various world religions, but the most popular of all the world religions is always, Wicca. In the Wicca unit, the teacher gives the girls a project on Wicca, the project is to create a goddess. The goddess the girls create must have a list of attributes of who the god is.

Now get this, every time, without exception, when the girls come back with a the description of a goddess, the description they give is an exact description of who they are themselves. The girls create a goddess that is a exact reflection of themselves, without exception. The goddess the girls create, is themselves.

That my friends, is your working definition of idolatry.

The god we create is ourself.

Further, in the modern world we just assume that the people of the ancient world were complete idiots. We assume that they were so ignorant that they actually thought this little tchotchke they picked up at a gift store, as it sat next to five hundred little tchotchkes just like it, was an actual god. This is not the case.

Let me take an example from modern Hinduism to explain. A modern Hindu who is a devotee to the god Shiva would purchase an image of the god Shiva, perhaps made out of brass, bring this god home and build a shrine for the object. Now this is not art, this is an object of veneration. Now the Hindu who purchased the image of the god Shiva knows that the image is not the god Shiva - for it sat on a shelf next to 50 other Shiva statues, just like it. Still, they venerate the object, why?

Because, while the metal image of Shiva is not the god Shiva itself, upon worship of the object, upon devotion of the object, the spirit of Shiva will inhabit the image.

See, we are back to dealing with the spiritual world again. These people buy the little tchotchke temples, not for a souvenir, not for a memory, people buy these objects so they can be in contact with the spirit of Artemis - So here is what we really have at the riot in

the city, not just funny little tchotchke makers, we have creators of occult objects used to allow people contact with evil spirits.

So, it looks like it is all about money, it smells like it is all about money, but it is not all about money, is it? Yes, these people are upset that their personal economy is failing, and yes, these people are in fact correct that Jesus Christ is at the root of their financial destruction, but the reality is that this is not about money, it is about a change of spiritual powers that is happening in the region.

Before, the occult had full dominance in the region, now the Jesus Christ is dominating the region. This isn't about tchotchkes, this is a spiritual battle being played out.

Christians and Christianity are being attacked. People are so upset at the spread of Christ, they are rioting. So how is this all handled? And how should we handle attacks against us according to this Scripture?

Well, I think the first thing we need to understand as Christians is that when things or people come against us, what is happening, may not be what appears to be happening. For instance here, this story appears to be about economics, when it is really about the spiritual forces behind the economics.

Do you see what I am saying here? As a Christian, you need to step back and take a look at things, "Is this situation here I'm in, about money, or is there something else going on here?" See, Paul means it when he says in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Paul isn't just being literary there, nor is he employing hyperbole. Paul wants us to look, and be aware that life isn't just what we can see and touch. Events behind the events may be what is really happening.

We see that Paul wants to go in to the theater and handle things directly, but he is stopped by his disciples and friends. I think that Paul was right to some degree, sometimes we do need to confront issues directly, but that is not always the case. Here it is not the case at all.

The Temple of Artemis is dying, this occult center is on its way out. Years later, in 252 A.D., the Goths would invade Ephesus and burn the temple to the ground. It was never rebuilt due to lack of interest.

Remember the simple math we talked about at the beginning of the sermon? The more Christianity spread, the less influence the occult had. The more Christians there were, the less people spent at the temples.

This Scripture this morning highlights for us a simple, yet profound concept for us in our personal lives that extends to the church as a whole, directly focus on Jesus Christ first, when the dominion of Jesus grows, when the influence of Jesus increases, other things will then decrease.