MARTIN LUTHER BUTTED HEADS WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH!

Martin Luther spent his early years as a monk and scholar. In 1517 he penned a document attacking the Catholic Church's corrupt practice of selling "indulgences" (tolerance, looking the other way, granting freedom from punishment) to absolve sin. This document - "95 Theses" - sparked the Protestant Reformation. This document proposed two major beliefs: (1) The Bible is the central religious authority, and (2) That humans reach or obtain salvation through their faith in Christ and not by their deeds/works. Luther's writings caused a division in the Catholic Church and Protestantism emerged, which changed the course of religious and cultural history.

In our Scripture reading today we will observe a "butting of heads" between the two prominent figures of the early Christian church - the Apostle Paul and Barnabas.

In verse 36 of Acts Chapter 15, after a period of time of preaching and teaching the Word of the Lord in Antioch, Paul had a driving passion to go back and visit those who had become believers on their first missionary journey. He wanted to see how they were doing. This was a great idea - and Barnabas agreed. After all, they made a great team of evangelists and experienced great results. However, they were well aware of the opposition to the Gospel in all those areas.
Here's where it gets interesting: “Barnabas wanted to take John, also called Mark, with them, but Paul did not think it wise to take him, because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in the work.” Acts 15:37-38 NIV

In Acts 13:13 we read that John Mark left Paul & Barnabas to return to Jerusalem after traveling with them to Cyprus and then to Pamphylia. No reason is given. But now, Barnabas "wanted" John Mark to travel with them again - but Paul didn't think it was "wise". Two trains of thought - two different ideas. Who was right and who was wrong? Could it be possible that both were right?

What's more important, "The ministry or the man"? Paul was thinking more about the ministry/mission/the work ahead, and Barnabas was thinking more about the man (John Mark, his cousin). Paul was more serious about going back and checking up on all the people that had been reached on their first journey - but Barnabas was more concerned about John Mark's value to their mission, his prior experience, and to his self-worth. Some people are more "Task-oriented", others are more "people-oriented".

Who was RIGHT? Is there any way to decide? Or was it just a matter of principle? Both thought they were right - and they "Butted Heads". They were unwilling to budge on their position. Do you detect a bit of
stubbornness in both Paul and Barnabas? Is this any way for two Christians to act . . . especially two influential, wise, Spirit-filled Christians?

I just learned of a book titled *Great Church Fights* by Leslie Flynn. I haven't read the book - I don't know if I want to. But there have been many disagreements between churches, between great men of God, and even between the early "church fathers" throughout the history of Christianity.

There's a story, I'm told, in this book about two porcupines in the freezing North woods that huddled together to keep warm. But whenever they got close, their quills pricked each other and they had to move apart. They *needed* each other for warmth but they *needled* each other with their sharp quills. Some church members are like those porcupines- they have their "good points", but you can't get near them.

**Wouldn't it be WONDERFUL if we - the church - could all get along in harmony.** But for sure, there will be differences and disagreements.

Back to the conflict between Paul and Barnabas: After the disagreement and parting of ways between these two men we hear nothing more about Barnabas and John Mark in the rest of the book of Acts. We may never know the full impact of this event on the history of the church. We only see Barnabas mentioned a few times in Paul's letters (1Corinthians 9:6; and Galatians chapter 2). However, Mark (Gospel writer) is also mentioned a few times - once briefly in Colossians 4:10, and then in 2 Timothy 4:11.
In 2 Timothy 4:9-11, Paul writes to Timothy from a prison in Rome: “Do your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.”

Take note of a change in Paul's heart - he didn't mention (John) Mark deserting him on his first missionary journey, as he mentioned Demas deserting him. BUT HE SAID ABOUT Mark, " . . . he is helpful to me in my ministry." What a compliment!

Can you imagine how this must have made John Mark feel? Timothy was instructed to go and find Mark - to get him and bring him to Paul in prison. Try to imagine how Mark may have been feeling after being rejected by Paul. *It could have happened something like this: Barnabas, his cousin, contacts Mark and tells him that he wants him to "hit the road" again on another missionary trip - going back to some of the areas they went to before. (Possibly) Mark gets excited about being considered for this trip. Then he asks Barnabas, "Where's Paul?" Barnabas, being an honest, Spirit-filled man, has to tell him the truth . . . "Paul didn't think it wise to take you with him so we are going on our own." Whaaaaat? I CAN ONLY IMAGINE THE REJECTION HE MUST HAVE FELT.

But now - Timothy finds John Mark and tells him that the Apostle Paul is in prison and "HE WANTS ME TO BRING YOU TO HIM BECAUSE YOU
ARE USEFUL TO HIM IN MINISTRY." Possibly Mark replied, "Whaaaat? Paul said that? About me? USEFUL?"

How can I "wrap this up"? How can this story apply to me - to us?

• Remember the porcupines - "They needed each other for warmth but they needled each other with their sharp quills". Some people just can't work together. This doesn't mean that they shouldn't, or can't LOVE EACH OTHER.

• In spite of our differences with others, we can, and should strive for harmony with them and "value" them for who they are. We in the church are children of God our Father - we are family.

Don't let a disagreement or disconnection with another "brother or sister" cause a discount or denial of their value to the ministry. (ELI)

Romans 12:17-19 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.”

Philippians 2:3-4 “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”