

The Rock: 07-11-2021**Community series**

First reading: None

Title: Helpers in a healthy community

Scripture: Acts 6:1-7

Theme:

A growing, healthy church, from the top down is full of helpers. From the leaders to the greeters to lawn care people -all are vital to the health of the body.

Introduction:

This week we continue to look at the book of Acts and how the church was formed. It's quite a thing really, and I say that because there is so much from then that pertains to the now.

Without too much of a stretch, because human beings are involved, and because there is nothing new under the sun, we can always find things to learn and re-learn.

A key thing to remember is that it is God who is calling and making a people for His very own. We get the blessing of that calling and joy of working together in

His good world to share the love of Jesus with people.

What we see here in our text this morning, at least from where I am going to circle my thoughts around, are a few things:

1-Prejudice has no place among God's people (Vs1)

2-Staying focused on the main things keeps us healthy as each task is vital. Yet, each task is to be done by those called and gifted. (Vs 2-4)

3-A church with confident leaders and a focused congregation is the healthiest (Vs 5-6)

4-When the word of God is the guidebook, the community grows (Vs 7)

If we were to continue through to the end of the chapter, and I leave that with you to do, we will see Stephen arrested, not because he was quietly selling flowers on the corner.

Rather it was because he was clearly and confidently declaring the truths of Scripture. I'm reminded of a quote from Martin Luther: Always preach in such a way that if people do not come to hate their sin, they will instead hate you."

It seems Stephen had that gift...

-Acts 6:10 ESV

"But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking."

I think this will continue to be an important talking point as it is core value number one for me:

-The Bible is my guidebook for living.

Truth verses opinion -it's here where we get a very healthy church or a very lost and confused church. You see, if we consider our opinion, truth, then the Bible can mean whatever we wish it to mean.

That creates a lot of problems, the least of which is a confused and unhealthy church. Always ending with the very dangerous question when we read something that challenges us: "Did God really say?" "Did God really mean?"

A snake asked that question once, and that didn't end well. So, we have to start there, otherwise we are just always rooted in conjecture and opinion.

The Story:

What we are finding here this morning is that the Church is growing, but they had

yet to sort out what we would call, "second tier leadership".

Had the Apostles not understood their specific role and calling, everything would have bottle-necked here and growth would have stunted and the community stagnated.

Let's take a minute to see what they didn't do. They didn't go to committee to debate, sort out and argue. Rather, in full confidence they called the entire body together to define leadership roles:

-Acts 6:2 ESV

"And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."

At first glance, especially if and when we bring our own preconceived notions to this, we may tend to think that perhaps this sounds a bit arrogant, and perhaps even lazy.

I've actually heard that argument that the Apostles were just lazy and didn't want to do "menial" labor they now felt was beneath them.

Again, a simple reading of this text within context kills that thought and

speaks more to our pride than it does to their declaration.

A leader, a good one, is servant to all - but will never be mastered by any. Any that is except Jesus. No, what we have here is a very confident and humble group of men who know what God has called them to. So that's what they are focusing on.

It's not that they can't do these things, but rather they shouldn't do these things. Most especially if it takes away from their primary task of preaching and teaching.

This is important in any church growth. I can do a lot of things, that's never the question, because so can you. But, what should we be doing?

Remember, we are not called to do nothing, yet neither are we called to do everything.

So, as we go through this passage this morning, one thing in relation to all of this -We have to sort out our opinions from what the Bible says on this page.

Matt Chandler puts it best: "It cannot mean to us, what it didn't mean to them." So, what did this mean to them?

Surprisingly, this little section has a great deal to say to us today about very

applicable cultural views and Church structure.

The first thing we see here in the formation of a healthy church is this:

#1-Prejudice has no place among God's people.

-Acts 6:1 ESV

"Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution."

This is vital, right up to today. We talked / learned last week about being citizens of heaven first because God is calling all nations to Him.

Not a specific land, as King David taught us a couple weeks back (Ps. 37) but as Jesus redefined, it is the whole earth which the meek will inherit.

Psalms 2 is a great reminder that we are praying too small if we aren't praying in that way:

-Psalms 2:8 ESV

"Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."

This truth will make Heaven and the Church in the here and now a very uncomfortable place for someone who is prejudice.

To mistreat, divide, or condone any kind of division based on race, ethnicity, socio-economic standing, etc. - is wrong.

The very first issue after the dishonesty of chapter five that the early church leaders had to deal with was the giving of food to the community in a proper way.

Among the Jewish believers, God had begun to call and bring in "Hellenist's". Greek people who had converted to Judaism- and it seems clear that the people in charge of making sure the community had food to eat, weren't giving enough (or any at all to those who weren't "Hebrew").

With all of the unity within the early church, prejudice still existed. Already this early on, the church was looking too much like the culture instead of the Kingdom to come and New Creation people.

Widows who were "outsiders", at least to those who were seeing themselves as "insiders", funny how that works, huh, were being ignored and going hungry.

It had become bad enough that they went to the Apostles and complained that they were hungry and being ignored.

The Church will always be blessed in proportion to how she cares for the poor and needy among us. This is a simple Biblical principle and truth. NOT a political opinion and position.

Moses himself was very clear about how God felt regarding this matter. A couple of statements God gave to Moses for our benefit:

-Deuteronomy 10:18-19 ESV

"He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt."

-Deuteronomy 16:11-12 ESV

"And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes."

Oh, but that's Old Testament -we're New Testament, its different now. Ok. Let's see what James has to say to that:

-James 1:27 ESV

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

This is God's heart from the beginning. We were foreigners, sojourners, at one time or another. Yet God looked with mercy upon us. We have to do the same because it's Biblical, not political.

Leave the porch light on always, for every wandering prodigal. Because at some point they will come home, and they will need to be fed and welcomed. The other stuff comes after...

Prejudice is a learned trait, something that is part of our broken world. Which means it can be unlearned. Right here at the outset that's what needs to happen.

We have to always be careful, because if we aren't, the culture creeps in, even unintentionally. Just as with these folks, we must always be careful and self-aware as we serve others.

#2 -Stay focused**-Acts 6:3-4 ESV**

"Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

This keeps us healthy as each task is vital and essential. Yet, each task is to be done by the appropriate people, as God has assigned.

Part of what we see here is the result of what we learned last week. A healthy and well disciplined community.

Because of that, there was a trust and confidence to not only listen to their leaders, but to obey as well. They knew their community and trusted each other - even though some were making mistakes.

Unity and Trust!

How important this is when challenges come up. So many times, in Church work, I have seen division and argument not just with each other, but with and toward leaders whom God has placed over them.

I think, in part this is why we have the encouragement of Hebrews 13:

-Hebrews 13:7-8 ESV

'Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.'

-Hebrews 13:17 ESV

"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."

The encouragement is to stay focused, do the right thing, follow their lead. It is a beautiful thing really.

When a pastor and elders are focused on the spiritual and physical well-being of those God has placed under their care, we see the body grow in trust and how it thrives.

Also, as we see here in the text, how they care enough and are disciplined enough to pick the next level of leaders.

Notice please, that the Apostles didn't do that. No, they trusted the community to choose well, and they did. Pretty much every name was non-Jewish, letting us know that they picked to their weakness. Thus, creating unity and strength.

All the Apostles did was affirm their choices. Mutual trust and care! Responsibility at all levels of the Church. Leading to:

#3 Confident leaders and focused people

-Acts 6:5-6 ESV

"And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them."

Let's work the problem, not the people! Even hear that statement. How much we need to hear this more today.

There seems to be very little problem solving and communicating in that direction. Rather, it seems we tear people apart and down over our opinions and ideas.

We blame and brag, with very little problem-solving taking place. The Church is challenged in this way, because there were obviously those who weren't thinking right. But they worked the problem with the process.

Notice this please, the assignment isn't to fix THEM, is it? NOPE, instead, let's set up some leaders who can ensure that these ladies are getting their food. We are going to focus on our assigned task. Again verse 4:

-Acts 6:4 ESV

"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

#4 -When the Word of God is our guidebook, the community grows

I am only speculating here, but as a pastor, I know where my mind and prayer is going. Next Sunday, that's where. We will prayerfully bring a message that circles around what God has done in Jesus.

New Creation theology, the healing of the nations. Perhaps talking about Genesis 11 once again and Psalm 2 even. How God is calling a people for His very own from every nation, tribe and tongue.

That God's people don't have prejudice because in Christ we are all one and equal. Recognizing and celebrating our differences as God created us, doing so at the foot of the Cross.

Let's focus on that next Sunday. Look at the Word and what the Holy Scriptures

tell us. Peter, do you want to preach this one, or perhaps John or Andrew can take it..

I don't think I'm too far off here. Because after they affirm the choices of those who would eventually be called deacons, Luke tells us:

-Acts 6:7 ESV

"And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

This is a pattern which has worked from the very beginning. A healthy Church holds the word of God in high esteem. It is our guidebook for living, and the most precious gift we have next to our salvation in Christ.

It is also why the world and sadly many churches minimize it and question it. Remember - "Did God really say?" Yes, yes, He did.

Peter and Paul are clear on this as we come to a close:

-2 Timothy 3:14-17 ESV

"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed,

knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."

-2 Peter 1:19-21 ESV

"And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

The Church's health, and growth are directly related to how well we are disciplined, how and what we sing to the Lord, and how the word is preached.

These things keep us focused, they keep us from prejudice, they help us not only pick good leaders, but grow in unity and trust.

It helps us to sort out our calling and assignments in the Church and the wider world. Growing in proportion to how we serve and give.