

We must mobilize every member for ministry

Series: Acts of a Healthy Growing Church

Acts 6:1-7

February 19, 2017

Welcome again to worship today.

I saw Kent Genslinger at Sycamore Hospital this past week while he was volunteering. I pointed out that I didn't have a joke last week, and you know what, he was right. So I definitely need to make up for last week. How about these Bible Riddles:

Q. What kind of man was Boaz before he married Ruth?

A. Ruthless.

Q. What do they call pastors in Germany?

A. German Shepherds.

Q. Who was the greatest financier in the Bible?

A. Noah. He was floating his stock while everyone else was in liquidation.

Q. Who was the greatest comedian in the Bible?

A. Samson. He brought the house down.

Q. What excuse did Adam give to his children as to why he no longer lived in Eden?

A. Your mother ate us out of house and home.

Q. Which servant of God was the most flagrant lawbreaker in the Bible?

A. Moses. He broke all 10 commandments at once.

Q. Why didn't they play cards on the Ark?

A. Because Noah was standing on the deck.

We are in the midst of our series "Acts of a Healthy Growing Church." We are looking back at the Early Church through the book of Acts and see how they were healthy and growing. I've listed in the bulletin the first six acts we covered. Today, our act of a healthy growing church is this: Today: We must mobilize every member for ministry.

So far in the story of the Early Church, it has been pretty rosy picture:

In Acts 1, there are twelve on the leadership team and about 120 in the congregation. Those were worldwide numbers – all the church members that existed.

In Acts 2, the day of Pentecost launches the Church with a supernatural display of tongues of fire that settle on the believers, coupled with the ability to speak in various languages, and summed up by Peter's passionate sermon which results in 3,000 baptized and added to the Church. Amazing first day.

Acts 3 then tells the story of Peter and John going to the Temple for worship, encountering a man lame from birth who asks them for money. Remember what Peter says? "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"¹ And the man jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk. And the people who saw the miracle and heard Peter's subsequent sermon believed, so that the church now totaled 5,000.²

The Bible also says this new Church was united in heart and mind. They instituted an outreach ministry where they shared their possessions. Acts 4 reads,

¹ Acts 3:6 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

² Acts 4:4

“There were no needy people among them, because those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles to give to those in need.”³ And the apostles were performing many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. The believers were held in high regard by the population, and more and more folks believed and were brought to Christ.⁴ This new thing called the Church was awesome.

When we read these descriptions – the miracles, the sharing and generosity, the fellowship – we may wish we could have been a part of this “perfect” church. In reality, the Early Church had problems just as we do today. It’s naive to think that churches don’t have problems – they do, even one that was led by Jesus’ own disciples. Listen to the story from Acts 6:

*But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.” Everyone liked this idea, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (an earlier convert to the Jewish faith). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them. So God’s message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too.*⁵

You see, as that early church increased in size, so did its needs. Think about it: if 3,000 people got connected to Germantown in a day, we would have a big need on our hands: not enough donuts.

Well, the one big need the Early Church had was organizing the donuts, the distribution of food to the poor. You see, in the Temple, there was a routine custom where two collectors went round the market and the private houses every Friday morning and took up a collection for the needy, partly in money, and partly in goods. Later in the day, this was distributed. Those who were temporarily in need received enough to enable them to carry on; and those who were permanently unable to support themselves received enough for two meals a day for a week. The fund from which this distribution was made was called the *Kuppah* or Basket.⁶

But when the Jewish widows became Christians, they were cut off from Temple funds. So they went to the Church, who took up this ministry from the common fund provided for all who needed it.⁷

However, in this new Christian community, there was a division. In the new Church, there were two kinds of Jews. There were the Jerusalem and the Palestinian Jews who spoke Hebrew and prided themselves that there were no foreigners in their

³ Acts 4:34-35 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

⁴ Acts 5:12-15

⁵ Acts 6:1-7 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

⁶ In addition to this a house-to-house collection was made daily for those in pressing need. This was called the Tamhui, or Tray.

⁷ Acts 4:32-37

ancestry. Then there were Jews from foreign countries, who had come for Pentecost and found Jesus. Many of these had been away from Palestine for generations; they had forgotten their Hebrew and spoke only Greek. The natural consequence was that the spiritually snobbish Hebrew-speaking Jews looked down on the Greek-speaking Jews, and the widows of the Greek-speaking Jews were being neglected, possibly deliberately.⁸

And so the rumblings began. The word used here means “mutter” or “murmur.” It refers to the secret grumblings that buzz away till they are heard.⁹

And you know what? When there’s buzz around, it takes away the energy and enthusiasm and joy in the church. We feel great about the church when 3,000 join. We are so happy when we see the church thriving. We feel such warmth and love with the fellowship, generosity, and compassion. We want to invite everyone we know when everyone is unified.

And yet, when we stop being led by the Spirit, when we do things that do not love God and love people, then here comes the buzz. Before they were all one heart and mind, no needs among them, but now they began to murmur. They have brought the habits of their old life into the Church.

Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his autobiography that during his student days, he was interested in the Bible. Deeply touched by reading the Gospels, he seriously considered becoming a Christian. It seemed to offer the real solution to the caste system that was dividing the people of India. One Sunday, he went to a church to see the minister and ask for instruction on the way of salvation and other Christian doctrines. But when he entered the sanctuary, the ushers refused him a seat, and suggested that he go and worship with his own people. He left and never went back. He said to himself, “If Christians have caste differences, I might as well remain Hindu.”

The Early Church was having problems and the apostles find out about the rumblings, and like all good Methodists... called a meeting.

Assume you are one of the Apostles. What is your plan considering these issues?

1. Factions within the Church and dissention within the ranks of believers.
2. Lack of manpower to handle the church’s needs.
3. The Church is growing faster than they can manage it.
4. Lack of common language and procedures for resolving differences.

What would you do? Here’s what the Apostles did. They gathered the people together and said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program.”¹⁰ The Message Bible puts it this way: “It wouldn’t be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor.”¹¹

Now, hold the phone. Let’s stop right there. Did you hear that? “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program.”¹² Ok, does anyone have a problem with that? Does it seem like the Apostles are uncaring and

⁸ Barclay’s Daily Study Bible (NT), Acts 6:1-7

⁹ Word Pictures in the New Testament, Acts 6:1

¹⁰ Acts 6:2 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

¹¹ Acts 6:2 (The Message)

¹² Acts 6:2 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

not very pastoral? "We're not going to abandon our preaching and teaching to help widows and the poor." What's your initial reaction to that? "These guys are jerks."

Maybe you feel that way. You think, "Hey, it's the pastor's responsibility to take care of those less fortunate, to care for widows." If a poor person comes to the church asking for help, who do you call? The pastor, right? Those who are lonely and need someone to talk to? That's the pastor's responsibility. That's how many people feel.

But what does the Bible say the Apostles did? They needed to preach the Word of God. They did not feel it was the best use of their resources to dole out money and food to the widows. Other things were more important to the early Church's survival.

So they set priorities for their ministry. They realized that it would be impossible to successfully minister to all the community's needs. They called a meeting and reasoned that the Twelve should devote their ministry to preaching and teaching the word of God. Ministering to the widows was important, but it was not their chief priority. The community needed to be strengthened through prayer, preaching, and teaching. The early Church was growing and the Apostles were called to evangelize to all nations. How could they fulfill the Divine Commission if they had to take care of the food?

So the Apostles arrived at a solution: they would mobilize others for ministry. The Apostles had unique spiritual gifts, and they were to use these gifts to grow the community. Other people in the community also had special spiritual gifts and their special calling. The apostles advised the church to select these persons to see to the widows' needs.

That's what happened: the apostles put seven respected Greek-speaking men in charge of the food distribution program. This solved the problem and allowed the apostles to keep their focus on teaching and preaching the Good News about Jesus.¹³ And that was the correct priority. Every member in ministry.

A first grade teacher once asked her students, "What do you do to help at home?"

One little girl said, "I dry the dishes."

One of the boys said, "I sweep the floor."

Another one said, "I feed and water the dog."

Every student in the class had something to contribute except for one boy sitting in the back. The teacher looked at him asked, "What do you do to help out at home?"

He said, "I stay out of the way."

That's a problem in the church. Too many church members just stay out of the way. A Gallup poll discovered that only 10% of church members are active in any kind of personal ministry in their church. 50% said that they have no desire or interest in serving in any ministry.¹⁴

To combat this, we have to be reminded of Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. It's in your bulletin on page 6.

Now, we don't have time to read this passage, but I want to quickly share three vital truths here that will help us be a healthy growing congregation as we mobilize every member for ministry.

First, we are all a part of the Body of Christ. Verse 27:

¹³ Life Application Bible Notes, Acts 6:1

¹⁴ From a sermon by Michael Luke, The Demonstration Factor, 5/5/2011

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*¹⁵

We are all part of this body – right here – this body of Jesus Christ. We are together part of the body of Christ. We are not isolated, on our own. We are connected together in this body.

Second, we are all a different part of the Body of Christ. Verse 14:

*Now the body is not made up of one part but of many.*¹⁶

Each of us are different parts on this body. We have different roles. Some do this; others do that. We have all been designed by God to function and help this body live and grow.

Third, we are all a vital part of the Body of Christ. Verse 26:

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*¹⁷

It is important that every part of this body, every person in this body of Christ called Germantown United Methodist Church, perform their function within the body of Christ. Because what happens when a part of the body stops performing its function? It leads to dysfunction, disease, and even death.

Jackie Robinson was the first black to play major league baseball. While breaking baseball's "color barrier," he faced jeering crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium in Brooklyn, he committed an error. His own fans began to ridicule him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the fans jeered. Then shortstop "Pee Wee" Reese came over and stood next to him. He put his arm around Jackie Robinson and faced the crowd. The fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that arm around his shoulder saved his career.¹⁸

Pee Wee didn't go do the coach's job of straightening out a ball player. He also didn't do Jackie Robinson's job; he just put his arm around him and helped him face the next ground ball. See a need; meet a need.

The Apostles advised the community to choose seven honest men full of the Holy Spirit to minister to the widows. The Apostles were to devote themselves to prayer and preaching. The Church responded by choosing seven men full of faith and the Holy Spirit and everyone was pleased with their decision.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit is at work in our lives, when the Spirit is allowed to be the guide and strength of a congregation, then it becomes a serving community, discerning the needs around them, and then being led by that same Spirit, to appoint persons who are uniquely gifted and prepared for ministry.

You are a minister. The "priesthood of believers" the Bible says. You are part of this body of Christ, and everyone must be mobilized for ministry for his to be a healthy growing church.

If you are not in a ministry right now, get in one. Ask a friend and join them in ministry. Look through the bulletin at the ministries and find out who is doing that, then volunteer to help. Talk to staff about how you might help in ministry.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:14 (NIV)

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:26 (NIV)

¹⁸ Larry Wise, East Troy, Wisconsin. Leadership, Vol. 11, no. 2.

The life of the this body of Christ – the life of those who do not yet know Jesus – the life of the people here – all these depend upon each part of the body functioning. Get involved. See a need. Meet a need.