

We must move out with God's message

Acts of a Healthy Growing Church

Acts 1:8; 8:1-8

February 26, 2017

Welcome again to Germantown UMC. What a wonderful day today is. Being together in the house of the Lord is the best thing. The sausage is probably next for me. And of course, raising money for the hungry in Montgomery County is terrific. So I'm glad you are here. And after worship, you can go down and have brunch. You'll still have time afterwards to go home, take a nap, and watch the Daytona 500.

Story goes of a doctor, a lawyer, a little boy and a priest were out for a Sunday afternoon flight on a small private plane. Suddenly, the plane developed engine trouble. In spite of the best efforts of the pilot, the plane started to go down. Finally, the pilot grabbed a parachute, yelled to the passengers that they had better jump, and then he bailed out.

Unfortunately, there were only 3 parachutes remaining. The doctor said "I'm a doctor, I save lives, so I must live." He grabbed a parachute and jumped out.

The lawyer said, "I'm a lawyer and lawyers are the smartest people in the world. I deserve to live." He also grabbed a parachute and jumped.

The priest looked at the little boy and said, "My son, I've lived a long and full life. You are young and have your whole life ahead of you. Take the last parachute and live in peace."

The little boy handed the parachute back to the priest and said, "Not to worry, Father. The 'smartest man in the world' just jumped with my back pack."

I'm not sure how that connects with my sermon today. Oh, yeah. There are a lot of ideas out there about how to survive when it seems the plane is going down, a lot of steps to health, whether it be physical or emotional help. Even in church leadership circles, there are lists and lists and lists. But there is a lot to be said about looking at a church with a proven history, with a track record in an environment that was so hostile to it that their leader was crucified.

Today, we are concluding our series "Acts of a Healthy Growing Church." We've been studying the Early Church through the Book of Acts. This was a church that went from 120 members to 3,000 in one day. Then they grew to 5,000 and more.

B. H. Carroll, a famous Bible scholar, in his commentary, estimates that there were probably a 100,000 members in the Jerusalem church within 25 years of Jesus' death and resurrection. Many others have agreed. In any Bible dictionary, it will tell you that in New Testament times, the city of Jerusalem had approximately 200,000 people. What we have here is a church with 100,000 members in a city of 200,000 people. Half the city had come to Christ. No wonder the religious leaders of the day felt threaten by the disciples. They said, "You've filled Jerusalem."¹

When you look at the book of Acts, you find 8 characteristics of the early church that positioned them for this kind of blessing from God. If we echo the actions of the early church, we can expect God's blessing on our church as much as those ancient leaders saw a blessing on the church in Jerusalem.

On page 5 in your bulletin is a place for you to take notes. We have learned:

¹ See Acts 5:28

1. We must minister in the Holy Spirit's power. Often in the church, we rely on our own power to do the ministry of God, when the only way we can do the ministry of God is not through our power, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. We must maintain a warm fellowship. We talked about how the church is a family.
3. We must multiply small groups. Small groups are the place where our faith and our fellowship really grows.
4. We must give people the chance for new life. Jesus gives us new life, and we must help others realize that they can have a new life as well.
5. We must maximize the power of prayer. Remember what I taught you?
 Much prayer – much power.
 Little prayer – little power.
 No prayer – no power.
6. We must model Christ-like generosity. When the church models Christ-like generosity, there are no needs left unaddressed because when believers see a need, they meet the need.
7. We must mobilize every member for ministry. We are all part of the body of Christ. It is important that 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.

Today, our final act of a healthy growing church is this: We must move out with God's message.

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, and 10 days before Pentecost, He told the disciples this in Acts 1:8. It's in your bulletin; will you read it with me:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*²

This verse describes a series of ever-widening circles. The Good News was to spread, geographically, from Jerusalem, into Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth.

Well, it did start with devout Jews in Jerusalem. This is where the church began and was growing. But they had not moved out with God's message.

So like a mother bird who has to push it's chicks out of the nest so that they can do what they were created to do (fly), so God pushed the Early Church out of the nest of Jerusalem. And it took persecution to do that.

We learned in Acts 6 that a man named Stephen was appointed to be one of the 7 servants who were to direct the food distribution. He was full of faith, the Holy Spirit, God's grace, and power, and he did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Opposition arose against him and his preaching, and he was falsely accused of blasphemy, so the Sanhedrin – the Jewish high court, and the ones that condemned Jesus to death – arrested Stephen and put him on trial. In his defense, Stephen preached a powerful and convicting sermon. But instead of repenting, they took him out and stoned him to death. Immediately, a wave of persecution arose, with a guy by the name of Saul leading the way.³

The result of this persecution was instantaneous. Acts 8:1:

² Acts 1:8 (NIV)

³ See Acts 6:8-8:3

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.⁴

Here's where we pick up the story. Acts 8:4-8 is printed in your bulletin. Follow along as I read from the Message version.

Forced to leave home base, the Christians all became missionaries. Wherever they were scattered, they preached the Message about Jesus. Going down to a Samaritan city, Philip proclaimed the Message of the Messiah. When the people heard what he had to say and saw the miracles, the clear signs of God's action, they hung on his every word. Many who could neither stand nor walk were healed that day. The evil spirits protested loudly as they were sent on their way. And what joy in the city!⁵

I want us to look at three keys when we move out with God's message.

First, the People of the Message.

The passage tells us that Philip went to the city of Samaria. That was a big deal, because the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans.⁶

The quarrel between the Jews and the Samaritans was centuries old. After King Solomon's death, the nation split in two. The Northern Kingdom came to be known as Israel, while the Southern Kingdom was called Judah. Israel's capital was Samaria, and immediately turned to idol worship instead of worshipping the one true God. In the 8th century B.C., the Assyrians conquered Israel and deported the majority of the population, and replaced them with foreigners. In the 6th century, the Babylonians conquered Judah with its capital Jerusalem, and its inhabitants were carried away to Babylon. But they refused to lose their identity and remained Jewish. Ninety years later, they were allowed to return and to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

In the meantime, those of the Northern Kingdom who had been left in Palestine had intermarried with the displaced races who had been brought in. When the people of the Judah returned and set to build their city, these people around Samaria offered their help. It was contemptuously refused because they were no longer pure Jews. From that day onwards, there was an unhealed breach and a bitter hatred between Jews and Samaritans.

The fact that Philip preached in Samaria and that the message of Jesus was given to these people shows the Church taking one of the most important steps in history and discovering that Christ is for all the world. Philip was fulfilling Jesus's command in Acts 1:8 to "be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria..." But it took persecution for the witnessing to get into Samaria.

Philip went to the people who needed to hear the message.

Second, the Person of the Message.

Philip went to Samaria – the hated country – with God's message of love. That's the kind of guy he was. Remember, he was one of the seven, along with Stephen, picked to care for the food distribution. He was chosen because he was full of the Spirit, full of wisdom and good sense, and because of his compassion for those in need. So when the persecution hit and the church scattered, Philip went to the place where people were in need – in need of a Savior whose love could overcome the centuries of animosity.

⁴ Acts 8:1b (NIV)

⁵ Acts 8:4-8 (MSG)

⁶ See John 4:9

What should be the result of today, the Day of Caring? Sure, we are helping raise money for the hungry here in Montgomery County. But I want you to hear this, and especially those who are in the kitchen right now. Are you listening down there?

Here is what should happen today. We who are caring about the hungry, the needy, those overlooked, those ignored, those ostracized, those discarded and left to judgement in hell, should take this compassion and move out with God's message. Philip wasn't just a provider of food, an organizer, a servant; he was an evangelist.

When we are feeding people, we cannot forget to feed their souls. When we are helping the less fortunate, we cannot hold back the message of the hope of God. When we are reaching the lost, we cannot forget that we too once were lost and help another find their way home to Christ. Forgetting the message means we are simply another handout program – no better than the government. We have a message of love and hope for the Samaritans of our world.

Philip's message was Christ centered. Leave out Jesus Christ and you have no message. There is no Gospel in your message if Christ is not in your message.

Finally, the Power of the Message. Look at verses 6-7:

When the people heard what he had to say and saw the miracles, the clear signs of God's action, they hung on his every word. Many who could neither stand nor walk were healed that day. The evil spirits protested loudly as they were sent on their way.⁷

Philip's preaching was accompanied by miracles which substantiated his preaching. The miracles mentioned here were twofold.

First, the restoring of health. Many were healed. Physical healing in the Bible times was always greatly needed because medical practices were so primitive at that time compared to our time. Philip was given power from Christ to heal the sick, because Christ is the great physician.

Second, the removing of demons, evil spirits. Demon possession was a big problem in that day, but Philip had the power to cast out demons. Such power comes from God. Today, demons have become very sophisticated in their work but they are still feverishly at work.⁸

When we move out with God's message, we must move out with power. Now, don't think you've got to do it on your own. It is the Holy Spirit's power that is being used, not ours.

COMMENT

But you know what? That's not the only power. There is also power in our personal witness of what God has done in us.

A man was being tailgated by a stressed out woman on a busy boulevard. Suddenly, the light turned yellow just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crosswalk, even though he could have beaten the red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman was furious and honked her horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection.

As she was still in mid-rant, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer ordered her to exit her car with her

⁷ Acts 8:6-7 (MSG)

⁸ Analytical Bible Expositor - Analytical Bible Expositor – Acts 8:1-8

hands up. He took her to the police station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell.

After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the booking desk where the arresting officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, flipping off the guy in front of you, and cussing a blue streak at him. And I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'Follow Me to Sunday School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the trunk. Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car."

NO ONE CAN ARGUE AGAINST YOUR MESSAGE IF YOUR LIFE DEMONSTRATES A TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE POWER OF THE CROSS.

Each week of our series, we have seen a result. Look at verse 8 to see what happens when we move out with God's message:

And what joy in the city!⁹

There was great joy in that city. Wherever Christ is preached and received, there will be joy. Our land is burdened with a great load of sorrow right now that only Christ can remove. Satan would tell us that Christianity is a kill-joy, but it is sin that kills joy. Christ is the One Who brings great joy, and our country needs this joy of Christ badly.

As we close this series on the "Acts of a Healthy Growing Church," I want to tell you that our church leadership will be discussing how we are doing as a congregation on these eight acts. I want you to be thinking about them as well, because we want to be a healthy, growing church. I believe we are really good with some of these acts, and that we need to improve on some others. So, I want us all to think about these acts and our congregation.

But I want to point out something else.

The acts of a healthy growing church are the acts of a healthy growing Christian.

1. We all must minister in the Holy Spirit's power.
2. We all must maintain a warm fellowship.
3. We all must be in a small groups.
4. We all must give people the chance for new life.
5. We all must maximize the power of prayer.
6. We all must model Christ-like generosity.
7. We all must mobilize every member for ministry.
8. We all must move out with God's message.

God's Good News has not reached the ends of the world if someone in your family, your workplace, your school, or your community hasn't heard the Good News about Jesus Christ. Make sure that you are contributing in some way to the ever-widening circle of God's loving message.¹⁰

⁹ Acts 8:8 (MSG)

¹⁰ Life Application Study Bible, Acts 1:8