

Teaching and serving * Acts 6

June 14, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

The passage that we're going to look at today made me really glad to be at Langford Community Church. Because in good times and in bad, you take care of each other. There is no doubt in my mind that if someone needed help, there would be a line of people, ready to help, to cook a meal, to share some money, lend a hand. We take care of each other.

And that's something that the early church had to learn how to do in the book of Acts. It didn't come as naturally to them and so they had to learn it by trial and error. The first generation of Christians came from very different backgrounds, different social classes and different lifestyles and when they decided to follow Jesus, they suddenly found themselves united within in the family of God. And so they had to learn how to take care of each other.

And that was something they really needed to do. Some of them had lost their families because of Jesus, their access to resources, they were disowned for becoming a Christian, and so there was a very real need for the Church to share resources in order to make sure that no one went hungry. And in Acts chapter 6, we see the church wrestling with questions like 'how do we care for each other?' And 'who spearheads the project? We know fellowship and breaking bread is important, but who's doing the serving?' Those are good questions for us to ask too, so let's go to Acts chapter 6 and we'll see what they learned.

NIV Acts 6:1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, (that's good) the Hellenistic Jews (the Greek speaking Jews) among them complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food (that's bad).

Every day, more and more people joined the Church, which meant that every day, there were more and more people to care for. Church wasn't just Sunday morning; they gathered daily to share their resources. And for some reason, the Hebrew speaking Christians were getting more than the Greek speaking Christians and so the Greek speakers went to the disciples to work it out.

Now, whether this was by accident or a racially motivated snub, I think it's a good opportunity for us to ask 'are we excluding anyone in the work of ministry we do?' 'Are we playing favorites with some over others?' 'Are there cliques within our church that imply that some people are better than others?' 'Do we prioritize the interests of the city people over the country people or vice versa?' I'm not aware of anything like this on a surface level but it's something that we need to guard against – everyone in the Church should feel equally welcome and equally taken care of.

So Greek speakers bring the problem to the apostles and right away, we learn another lesson from the church. The disciples don't ignore it and hope it goes away. They waded right into and say 'let's work to make things right.' Verse 2 -

2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. (They know that they have an important job to do and they can't very well ignore it. Teaching is vitally important to the life of the Church and so they commit themselves to faithfully preaching the Word of God.

But just as teaching is vital, serving/care ministry is vital too. And so they say, verse 3 –

3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

The apostles here establish a very important principle for the life of the Church. Pastors NEED to teach. Their number one focus needs to be helping the church to follow Jesus. Now, that doesn't mean that he won't be a servant – I mean, that's a critical character point in a pastor's life – but the pastor can't get caught up doing other things and so neglect teaching.

The work of caring for one another then – of serving one another – is the equally important responsibility of the church. Of the people.

And this is actually where our word 'deacon' comes from. Where it says 'it would not be right to give up preaching to serve tables' – that sounds like you're a waiter at Swiss Chalet or something but it's actually a much broader kind of service. The apostles are really saying 'we need someone to run our food distribution ministry.' And so they say – 'let's appoint deacons – people from the church - who will spearhead our care ministry and make sure that everyone is being taken care of and treated equally.'

And actually, all of the names of the men whom they chose are Greek – Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas - it appears that they really wanted to make sure that there were no racial shenanigans from this point on.

And the apostles laid hands on them and commissioned them. And as they took care of the care ministry, making sure people had enough, the apostles continued with teaching and prayer and verse 7 says the Word of God spread and the number of disciples increased rapidly. The Church works well when everyone does their part.

So... what does this mean for us? Should establish a formal deacons' ministry at Langford? I'd be open to talking about that, but to be honest, I think that the LCW and Missions team are doing the work of deacons right now. And I'll tell you, it was really encouraging for me to be working on this TEACHING on Thursday, knowing that Mary and Joyce and others were getting ready to SERVE Blessings Centre that night. That's this passage in action.

So what's the take away? Well, I think I'd put it like this: We all share in the work of ministry but we all have different work. Preaching, teaching, serving, greeting, keeping up the building, giving money, doing dishes, sending cards – these are all very important ministries. You don't have to be behind a pulpit to do ministry. The church would falter if I was the only one doing ministry. We all share in the work of ministry, building each other up as the body of Christ.

But we all have different work. It would not benefit the church at all for me to try to do the accounting and what's more, it would actually take me away from the work that I really DO need to do. And God has put together the Body just the way He wants it, so that we have gifted financial people, building people, cooking people, giving people. God has put you here at Langford to do something important that only you can do. So let's keep the Word our primary focus and then work together to take care of each other.

We all share in the work of ministry but we all do different work.