

Scripture Reading:

Acts 6: “1 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. 2 Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; 4 but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, 6 whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. 7 Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith. 8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people.”

"A Dispute in the Church"

It is a joyous Lord's Day here at Church of the King where we have celebrated the baptism of little Makenna and will hear Steve Perry recite our covenant vows on behalf of his family as we approach the Lord's Table this morning.

- **It reminds us that the great promise of salvation is unto us and our children as we seek to serve God here at Church of the King!**

As we move now into chapters six and seven of the Book of Acts we have many lessons that can be learned about Church life from these early Saints in Luke's orderly account. We will see how problems in the Church were handled, the importance of Deacons and their work, and finally we will see in the life of Stephan, a bold witness for Jesus and the first Saint who gave his life for the faith, what we call martyrdom.

As we learn these important lessons we must also remember that Luke is continuing to give us the BIG picture of God's plan to fill the earth with the Kingdom of His Beloved Son! Jesus had commanded the disciples to be His 'witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.' The Church in Jerusalem is growing, working together and solving problems, being a great witness to Jerusalem as they were commanded!

As we come to the end of chapter seven we will see that God will not allow them to become complacent or comfortable in their success at the expense of His plan...

- **They WILL go on to witness in all Judea and Samaria!**
- **And we will be reminded, as we move on in the Book of Acts, that the work of taking the Kingdom to all the earth continues to this day!**

So the first thing that we come to in our text this morning is a problem that developed in the Church at Jerusalem.

- **Yes, a problem in the Church!**

Imagine that, here we have the Spirit filled Church, performing miracles, witnessing in Jerusalem, growing like crazy and being of one accord, meeting the needs of the Saints...

- **And Luke presents a problem...**

It reminds me of the wise council often given to those who struggle to find a church home: “If you find a perfect Church don’t join it because it will no longer be perfect. We talk often about the Church being the bride of Jesus, of the Church filling the earth with His Kingdom and how we are commanded by Paul to “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”

- So why does the Church have problems? It is full of sinners!

Jesus has come to save His people from their sins...

- Mission accomplished on the cross and confirmed in the power of His resurrection!

The Holy Spirit has come in power as the comforter for the Church with a plan to fill the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus... However, He does so with forgiven SINNERS

Yes, we are saved, justified by the salvation we have in Jesus. Yes, the Spirit is sanctifying all of the Saints in the Church as we grow up into the fullness of Jesus. BUT, we are not yet glorified. We are considered righteous because of what Jesus has done, NOT because of how well we live the Christian life!

- This is why Jesus said that the publican who came humbly before God confessing his sins went home justified...
- While the Pharisee who proudly listed his good works did not.

We must individually confess our sins if we are to know the forgiveness that Jesus offers to us! This is why we confess our sins individually and corporately when we approach God in worship on the Lord’s Day.

- If you desire to live in God’s presence in all of life, you will often confess your sins!

This is true of individuals and it is true for us as a Church:

- We cannot pretend that we are perfect or hide our failings if we want the power of the Spirit to be fully manifested in our lives.

So Luke honestly presents a problem that has arisen in the early church. It is not recorded so we will remember that the Apostles needed to focus on prayer and the Word or so that the office of Deacon could be introduced, though both are important.

- Luke weaves a number of failings into his orderly account to remind us that we, serving as Saints in the Church, are going to have problems!

We have studied the sin of Ananias and Sapphira, we will soon come to Simon the sorcerer and the very sad split between Paul and Barnabas. We will see sin in Peter’s life and even fights between churches. The Bible is not a fairy book tale about having new life in Jesus...

- The Bible is an honest account of the ravages that sin has brought into God’s creation and His story of redemption and restoration.

So what was the problem in the early church: It was not something that would surprise us even today. Some people were playing favorites and others were taking offense. We are not given enough detail to know how the blame should be apportioned, but Luke is clear that it is a REAL problem. A problem not unlike many we face today when different groups come together:

- The rich & the poor
- Different racial groups

- Young and old
- Even men and women

The Apostles see this problem as a real problem and move to present a solid solution. Here is an important lesson we should learn from this account:

- It is much better to find a solution and move forward than to simply focus on who is to blame!

This is certainly good advice when our marriages and families have tensions surrounding some problems and it is important for the life of our church as well. The Apostles also find a solution that avoids creating bigger problems. They realize that it might be easier to just jump in and fix the problem themselves, but that would divert them from the work they were called to do.

- It would also have meant that these faithful men would have been denied their opportunity to serve in the Church!

Parents and employers should understand this principle... IF you do not have employees and children to help with the many tasks at hand, you will be VERY busy doing things someone else could and often should be doing.

BUT as you let go you must be ready to let them learn, and even fail a bit, so they can become competent in doing the tasks they are called to do. When a mother trains a child to wash the dishes or do the laundry, that process takes MORE time than if she just did it herself.

- But if you continue to do everything yourself in a growing family, or business, then you will be very busy and not do any of the tasks well.

Over time all of the children will learn to do these tasks and you will have more time for other important tasks that you have as a parent! The same is true for employers and it is certainly true here at church.

You can pray for your pastor in this regard: I am certainly one who likes to just dig in and get things done and I can very easily get so busy doing all of these 'important' tasks that I have neglected the priority tasks which I have been called to carry out.

- I thank God for those here at Church of the King who have held me accountable in this area, and you know who you are!

So the Apostles tell them to select out seven men to serve the Church. Obviously this does not mean that every church should have seven deacons, nor do I think it was because they had seven divisions in the Church at Jerusalem as some speculate.

Seven is the number of completion in the Scriptures, primarily derived from the seven days of creation and I think it is telling us that we need to have enough men serving to meet all of the needs a church has.

The process that the Apostles lay out is the reason we select church leaders in a similar way today. Those who are qualified and show themselves willing to serve are brought before the congregation for their approval...

- Then they are commissioned and blessed for the work by the laying on of hands.

As we grow and more men are brought forward to serve here at Church of the King as Elders and Deacons, there will come a time where you will be asked to vote on whether such men should be called to serve us in the Church:

- This is a very important responsibility and it should not be taken lightly.

Finally, in our passage this morning we are given the names of the seven men who are chosen and blessed: We will see some of the service of Stephen and Phillip as we move on, but we know nothing of the other five men.

- I think this should remind us again that God cares about and knows all the details even if we don't see all that we might want to see.
- It is the same with the Apostles

We know from what is revealed in the New Testament some of what happened with Peter and John and James, but little or nothing about the other nine Apostles

[BTW, Luke in this passage confirms that Matthias was an Apostle when he refers to the twelve]

It is not that Peter, John and James were greater than the others, it is just that the Holy Spirit gave us details of their lives as examples. Such is the case with these seven men who all served in Christ's Church. We should appreciate their faithful service and also those parents, teachers and disciplers who prepared them to be ready to serve!

- Remember, it is our faithful service day by day in whatever role God has cast us that moves the Kingdom of God forward!

In closing I want us to take note of the qualifications the Apostles told the Saints to look for in these men as examples for us to follow today wherever we are called to serve:

They said to look for men who were:

- Of good reputation
- Full of the Holy Spirit
- Full of wisdom

I want to take a moment to consider each of these and to help us see how we should strive to have the same qualities in our lives if we would serve King Jesus faithfully.

First they were to have a good reputation... This is certainly not our modern concept of being famous like Tiger Woods or Kobe Bryant who we talked about two weeks ago.

- Having a good reputation means living a life that conforms with the commandments of God

This is also a challenge in our modern age that tells us to "do our own thing" or to "be yourself" not caring about what others think.

- We ARE to care about what others think, AND we are to do so humbly and through service.

Our reputation should not be based on bad things we have done or how popular we can make ourselves in the eyes of others.

- A good reputation that is pleasing to the Lord is one born out of humble service to others!

The next qualification the Apostles ask for might give us pause:

- They were to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
- Did not the Spirit fall on everyone at Pentecost?

Are the charismatics right? Do we need to have a second blessing where as Saints we are baptized in the Holy Spirit and speak in tongues?

[they would certainly make this argument!]

- Yes Luke does say the Saints were filled with the Spirit at Pentecost and this is when the promised Comforter was given to the Church and He will not forsake us.

But Luke also says Peter was filled with the Spirit as he spoke before the council and that the Saints were filled with the Spirit as they prayed. We will see Paul filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism but also being filled with the Spirit later in his ministry.

This “filling” has to do with who or what is controlling our lives...

Luke also told us that Satan had filled the heart of Ananias. Luke told us that the religious leaders were filled with indignation. Later in Acts we will see the Jews filled with envy and the Gentiles at Ephesus filled with confusion.

- The Apostles were looking for men who were living lives that were influenced by the power of the Holy Spirit, and this applies to us as well:

Listen to the admonition the Apostle Paul gives the Ephesians: “15 See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, 16 redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

- If you allow your life to be filled with the things and thoughts of the world, the flesh and the devil it will bring forth the same dissipation we see in a drunkard.
[you should have children observe drunks!]
- If we redeem the time we will be wise and ready to confront the evils of our day...
- If we do not, then we are part of the problem and not part of the solution which grieves the Spirit greatly!

Both Paul and these twelve Apostles closely link being filled with the Spirit and wisdom. This is where the charismatic movement has mostly gone wrong:

- They see being Spirit filled mostly in terms of emotions and miracles
- The Bible sees being Spirit filled in terms of knowledge and actions.
[please note the Bible always links knowledge with actions, there is no place in God’s plan for just head knowledge]
- This does not mean that charismatics have no knowledge and do no good works
- It also does not mean that we have no need for emotions or a proper place for miracles!

BUT, we need to see here and everywhere in the Bible that the focus of faithful service in the Kingdom is grounded in the knowledge of God and followed by faithful actions which result from following His commands.

- IF you love me keep my commandments Jesus told His disciples!

You can’t love someone you do not know and you cannot love someone who has authority over you if you do not obey them! This is why Luke keeps interspersing the reports about the life of the Church among the account of growth of the Church.

- So what does it mean to be wise?
- It means to know God’s will and to do God’s will!

The Christian life is that simple!

We often make things much more complicated than they need to be: In a moment we will respond to this message by singing “Trust and Obey” and that is good advice indeed.

- If a child is having trouble at home, the Bible says, “honor your mother and your father”

In the flesh we want to say, ‘but you don’t know my parents’ or ‘how can that help my situation.’

- Being Spirit filled means believing God when He says this is the first commandment with promise and doing what it says!
- A couple struggling in their relationship should follow the priorities given in the Scripture that a husband is to love his wife and that the wife is to submit to her husband

Again our flesh says, ‘you don’t know my husband or my wife’: ‘I tried loving her and she still did not do what I wanted,’ or ‘How can I submit to a man who is so stupid.’

- If you are Christians who want to be wise, filled with the Spirit and have a good reputation, then you need to get serious about these commands because your primary witness for Jesus to the world IS your marriage! *Let me repeat that...*

We could go on to talk about how we educate our children, how we run our businesses or our relationship with our employer, how we relate and involve ourselves with the civil magistrates...

- And it is going to come down to the same principles: Love God and love your neighbor!

We can go back to the Book of Deuteronomy where Moses instructs the people as they enter the land, we can go to the Book of Proverbs where Solomon instructs his son, we can study the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels or turn to the Epistles given to instruct the Church and the message is the same: Know who God is and follow His commands!

- Do these simple things and you will be greatly blessed as you rightly serve the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
- Fail to do these things and you will bring the curses of the covenant down upon your head!

Moses said to the people,

- “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil...”
- Seems like such an easy choice, but in our flesh we resist this wisdom with all our might

Here at Church of the King I trust that our desire is to be wise, Spirit filled Saints with a good reputation!

Toward that end, let us often pray for each other the prayer that Paul prayed for the Saints at Philippi: 9 “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Communion Meditation: Acts 2:40

“And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” 41 Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. 44 Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.