

Acts of the Holy Spirit - 7
Church will be Messy – Week of Oct 30, 2016
Bay Park Life Groups – Leader

Acts is the story of a church that doesn't want to move, that is culturally monotone. The Holy Spirit comes and moves this entrenched church out! It's the story of Babel in reverse. John Mahaffey

In Acts 6 we see the church facing some serious growing pains. This chapter is a beautiful reminder that God never intended his church to be mess free, rather God uses the messiness to do some of his greatest redemption work within and without.

1. If you could choose to relive or redo one event this past week, what would it be?

Read Acts 6:1-7 together

2. In verse 1 we note that for the first time Luke calls Christians “disciples”, a trend that will continue throughout Acts (e.g., 6:2, 7, 9:1, 19, 26, 11:26, 29, 13:52, 14:20 etc). Why is this important and what does it teach us?
3. The word “complained” (v. 1 NIV, NLT, ESV) can also be translated to *murmur or grumble*. The Greek word means “to speak privately in a low voice”.¹ What is it about murmuring and grumbling that is so destructive and what does Acts 6 teach us about how best to handle it?
4. Acts 6 records the Church’s first encounter with ethnically based discrimination. Hebraic Jews were from Palestine. They spoke Aramaic, the ancestral language of the Jews. Hellenistic Jews had embraced the predominant Greek culture, thought, customs and language. The issue wasn’t simply communication, there was a racial divide. Though both Christians, Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews looked at life and faith through different lenses. Intentional or not, the attitude of the Hebraic “purebred” Jews caused them to be blind to the Grecian Jews in their midst. How do you see this same story being played out in the church today?
5. Looking at verses 2-4 we note that church growth resulted in church tensions that in turned called for church structure. What is noteworthy about the way they chose to respond to the growing conflict?
 - The church was committed to outreach and in-reach. Their witness was in word and in service. The mission of the church wasn’t put on hold because of problems within.
 - They didn’t divide into two – 1st Hebraic Christian Church and the Full Gospel Hellenistic Church. The cross calls us to love cross-culturally, sacrificially.

¹ R. J. Utley, *Luke the Historian: The Book of Act* (Marshall, TX 20003) p 91

- The leaders delegated. Those chosen weren't just given a title, they were empowered to lead. We're not told what plan or arrangements they came up with. Just that they were chosen and given the responsibility and authority.
 - The apostles couldn't do it all. Healthy churches have many leaders. Every Christian needs to consider where God would have them contribute.
 - Leaders weren't selected based on popularity but on the basis of spiritual maturity. The church selected the men, but the apostles commissioned them.
 - They kept their response to the issue as simple as possible in order to be as effective as possible. In fact, given the gravity of the issue, it's surprising how quickly they dealt with it and moved on.
6. Why does Luke bother listing the names of those chosen (v. 5)? What's so significant about the names listed and what does this say about the work of the Gospel in the church?

The names listed are all Greek names. One (Nicolas) wasn't even a Jew. Most Jews of the Diaspora had both a Hebrew and Greek name. Hebraic Jews however would have most likely gone by their Hebrew name given their aversion for all things Greek. What Luke is telling us is that the church intentionally weighted the choosing of leaders towards the ethnically overlooked Hellenistic Jews. This was an act of racial reconciliation that would have been stretching for Hebraic Jews.

7. Luke is clear, the fact that they dealt with the discrimination from a Gospel perspective resulted in continued health and growth. How can we ensure that the messiness of being a church doesn't impede our missional call and effectiveness?
8. Verse 7 says "and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith". Both the conversion of priests, and the description of "became obedient to the faith" is a first. Why might priests suddenly be converting to Christianity and what is so significant about the phrase "obedient to the faith"?

Priests were called to shepherd and serve people. Over the years Judaism had become a monolithic institution with plenty of politics and abuses at all levels. It's possible that the priests were profoundly touched by how the early church dealt with a very discriminatory and divisive issue. Seeing the church love cross-culturally instead of dividing or imploding spoke deeply to their sense of calling. They saw God at work in a way that they had always longed to, and the Holy Spirit used that to draw them to Christ. That and the fact that the church didn't lose its evangelistic edge as it dealt with the messiness of day to day life. As for the term "obedient to the faith", it's a clear reminder that faith isn't just a creed we sign off on, but a new and changing life that we embrace. Our values, aspirations, attitudes, posture and priorities change, and continue to change as we embrace Christ.