

Kingdom Come: Gifting

Acts 6:1-7

We are 5 weeks into the final installment of our Kingdom Series...

Acts 6:1-7

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole multitude, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

[Appendicitis experience...]

...this small, seemingly insignificant part of my body ceased to function in a healthy way & shut my body down & I nearly died.

- This wasn't a STRONG part of my body or an OBVIOUS piece—like an arm or nose...
- It wasn't a WELL-KNOWN part—who thinks about their own appendix??

This small part of my body threatened to take my life when it failed to function...

—It turns out that a healthy, functioning appendix is IMPORTANT to a body!!

Our passage today exposes the importance of every part of Christ's Body each one of us.

- In our passage we see people from different backgrounds and cultures with different gifts...
- And we see these vastly different people and gifts working together in UNITY!
- This is amazing—How can this be?

So far Acts is has been a quick and fascinating read— the Church was growing SO fast!

- This INSANE, supernatural move of God is the fulfillment of a promise Jesus had made:

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

"...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."

- The explosive growth of the early Church is the direct effect of Spirit's power as Jesus promised!

And this movement WAS amazing—full of supernatural experiences and activity—MIRACLES

- But we see in our text that problems arose...problems not UNlike issues WE HAVE today:
 - disagreements, bad people, divisions, racial tensions...

Along with tremendous growth came tremendous obstacles to the mission...

- This is what we see in our text today—it begins and ends with a reference to growth.
 - and sandwiched in between them is some REAL church drama...
- **Acts 6:1, ...the disciples were increasing in number**
- **Acts 6:7, ...the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly...**

Between these two statements about explosive Church growth is an account of a serious challenge that might have taken the wind out of the Church's sails—it was serious...

There are 2 parts to this challenge facing the Church—the first one is that...

1. There was cultural and ethnic tension in the Church in Jerusalem.

Acts 6:1b

...the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution.

- There was conflict between the Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews) and the Hebrews (Hebrew- or Aramaic-speaking Jews) over a failure of the church to take care of the Hellenist widows.

Remember—Acts 4 a system had been developed to take care of the poor among them.

- Last week Dom taught this text and highlighted the radical generosity of the early Church:
 - **Acts 4:34-35...there were no needy people because people sold land and gave the \$\$ to the church to distribute to needy people.**

Today we see that this system was not working for one minority group in the Jerusalem church...

- **This could tarnish glory of Jesus in the eyes of culture, and the early Church might experience a serious setback—or even a split.**
 - *So cultural & ethnic tension in the church is the first part of this situation...*
2. **The SECOND challenge is that this issue might be dealt with by the WRONG PEOPLE...**

Acts 6:2

And the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."

The Apostles KNEW that they shouldn't be the one's to step in and re-vamp the serving ministry...

- But it seems that they felt an expectation from others to have a more hands-on management style in the Church.
- The men who were supposed to study & teach scripture felt pressure to leave their calling and serve widows.
- **This pressure to leave their calling was major threat to the entire movement!**

But the Church leaders were feeling the pressure to do a GOOD THING...right?

- It is a VERY GOOD THING for the Apostles to WANT to help the widows.
- The Church is being challenged by something GOOD—not something bad...**
- **But, “good” problems handled by the WRONG people can yield BAD results...**
 - It's the GOOD THINGS that tend to distract us much of the time—not always just bad things...

The Apostles dealt with this challenge by leaning into OTHER gifted people in the Church.

So who does the Church nominate? Seven Hellenistic men (they have Greek names)

- Seven men **full of the Spirit with wisdom** were commissioned to take care of this need.
- Seven men with GIFTINGS that were needed and were different from the Apostles gifts.

There are 3 things from this story to see about God's GIFTS for the Church:

1. **The Gifts are ESSENTIAL**
2. **The Gifts are DIVERSE**
3. **The Gifts are CONNECTED**

1. The Gifts are ESSENTIAL

In our text today **BOTH** callings were necessary

- Teaching & prayer HAD to continue AND The Widows HAD to be cared for with compassion...

- **BOTH** callings are fulfilled by GIFTED PEOPLE...
- **AND BOTH are vital to the health & future of the Church!**
- Neglecting either calling could undermine the reputation of the church & end its amazing growth.
 - BOTH giftings were ESSENTIAL!!

The solution to lean into the diversity of giftings and callings allowed 2 things:

1. The Apostles were able to continue in their primary calling of study & prayer AND
 2. Allowed OTHERS to serve and lead and operate in their gifting as well!
- **The end result was a new kind of teamwork in the body of Christ.**
 - Gifted people STEPPING UP and TAKING RESPONSIBILITY.
 - Practical needs were met **AND** the ministry of the Word and prayer were able to continue.

The Church was starting to recognize and commission DIFFERENT, NECESSARY gifts.

- *This is why Paul describes the Church as the “BODY of Christ—WE are each a part of a BODY.*
 - Together we function as a body functions.
 - YOU, Christian, are a part of a body.

A human body is an amazing thing—not to sound creepy, but **YOUR body is amazing.**

- We tend to become focused on the defects and imperfections of our own bodies...
- But it is amazing to remember how incredible these bodies really are!

A human body is a picture of both UNITY and DIVERSITY.

- If we want to know what the Church should look like consider the unity and diversity within our own bodies.
 - Each of us is made up of HUNDREDS of parts and bits and pieces and materials...
 - And all of these parts and pieces form systems...
 - And each of these systems fulfills a necessary task for the entire body...
- **The health and healthy participation of every single piece and part of a body is vital to the overall health of the body.**

Remember how my appendix became unhealthy and shut me down and nearly killed me??

- My APPENDIX!?!
- this small little part CRIPPLED my body when it failed to function...

My appendix story highlights the necessity for ALL parts of a body—as diverse as they are...

- ...for ALL parts of a body to be healthy and function together!

You may not realize this, but you are essential—VITAL—to the health of the Church!

Your spiritual health and spiritual gifting and passions and personality are NECESSARY here!

- And not only are all gifting ESSENTIAL, but secondly:

2. The Gifts are DIVERSE.

This is the picture that scripture paints of the Church—it is the BODY of Christ.

- It's AMAZING & COMPLEX—so intricate that we may struggle to see its astounding beauty.
- Just like our physical bodies, we can become so familiar with the defects, disproportions, and diseases in the Body of Christ that we fail to see the GLORY of it.

In describing the Church as Jesus' body, Paul reveals a Gospel mystery...

- **The church isn't just another organization; it is a spiritual organism—It is alive!!**
- **And just like our physical bodies, the Church is a picture of unity AND diversity.**

As one body we have many members—many parts.

- And these members do not all have the same function...
- There is both VAST diversity in it's form and clock-like unity in its function.

Romans 12:4-8—For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

- Notice that we all have: *DIFFERENT GIFTS... DIVERSE GIFTS...*

Please notice the tension held between the value of the collective—the BODY—and the significance of the INDIVIDUAL.

- Both are necessary—MANDATORY
- There is no healthy Body without healthy body parts!

Like all bodies, the BODY of Christ is structured to do certain things—specific things.

- These are things that an individual on our own—we cannot do!
- The many parts of the church—YOU & ME—we must be healthy AND we must work together.
- **The Church is BOTH a body—AND— is “many members.”**

In this design—this BODY— God assigns a dignity —a significance— to both the collective whole (the church) and the diverse individual parts—each of us...

- *However because we are SO diverse, it can be easy to question the necessity of every member...*
 - Particularly ourselves, **Am I really necessary?—What do I have to offer?...**
 - We know ourselves... & it’s sometimes unclear how we might be “necessary”...

Paul speaks to this in

1 Corinthians 12:15-18

Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

—Just think of the diversity of these parts—an EYE & an EAR??

God has designed the Body & has given value to every part and every member...

- We can’t trust our self-assessment when we think we’re not important, and we can’t trust our assessment of others when we think others are unimportant...
- **You are DIFFERENT—body parts are diverse!**
- **You are NECESSARY—every part is needed!!**
 - Our giftings are not only all NECESSARY and DIVERSE, they are CONNECTED!

#3. The Gifts are CONNECTED

So how does this work?? How can such DIVERSITY of gifts come together and function?

- They are connected —WE are connected— by Jesus:

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. 5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. 6 There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

Each of us performs a unique functions in the church.

- God gives each member of the body a **gift** and the **power** to exercise it “for the common good!”
 - And each gift, though empowered by the same Spirit, performs “different kinds of service” ...
- **Different members do different things—we are not all alike—and this brings UNITY!**
 - Men—you are all different and necessary here!!
 - Women—EACH of you are necessary here!
 - Single people, single parents, grandparents, mature believers, teenagers, new believers—you ALL NECESSARY!!
 - Each of you have EMPOWERED GIFTS to use!
- *YOUR GIFTS are vital for the health and unity of the Church as Jesus CONNECTS you to the other necessary, diverse giftings in His body!*

Remember, we’re are a BODY, but not just ANY body—we are the Body of CHRIST.

- JESUS is the HEAD of this body!!

Just like a brain sends signals to the rest of the body calling the body to action, so the Holy Spirit empowers us as the Church to do the will of the Head—the BRAIN—JESUS!!

- God made you and has given you unique gifts—we all have different gifts—like an orchestra...

The Philharmonic orchestra is like this—many gifts/instruments—ONE conductor...

In the same way, we should think of the challenge of different giftings working together...

- Different giftings could mean each of us has different priorities—which could lead to *DIS-unity*...
 - *This requires great humility and great faith to navigate because:*
- Some of you feel a sense of urgency to care for vulnerable, broken, at-risk people...
- Others have an urgency to actively work to end the evil of abortion...
- Some of you may feel an urgency to focus on evangelism and preaching in public...
- Many of you are working hard to see every believer connected into Christian community...
- Others have an urgency to PRAY and give themselves to intercession and prayer ministry.
- I’m sure I’m leaving MANY of your gifting and passions out...

Each of us has an empowered gifting & each is NECESSARY for the Church to be the Body that God has designed it to be!

- *So each of us MUST function individually in a way that mimics the unified systems of a BODY...*
 - This requires tremendous HUMILITY AND FAITH!
 - Because all of these different activities and priorities (and many more that I didn’t list) are necessary to the Body of Christ!
 - ***It CAN’T be ALL ABOUT YOUR THING!!***
- Whatever calling we have and whatever role we have, we should carefully—not to pridefully—assume others may not feel our level of urgency for our doing what we’re called to do.
 - Some of our roles may be IN or out of the spotlight—behind the scenes...
 - Others may be a more out-front role...
 - Others may be called to challenge and charge other Christians...
 - Others may be working with new Believers...

How can we all serve and lead in these ESSENTIAL, DIVERSE giftings AND be CONNECTED?

- *How was the early Church able to pull these diverse giftings together??*
- *Well, that is what KING JESUS does!*

What would it look like if Jesus really was the King of Ventura County?

- ***What would the Church look like?***
- ***What would are lives look like??***

- Every Christian would be serving here AND our community with their gifts...
- The Church would be reaching into every corner and demographic through the DIVERSITY of the gifts we all have...
- Jesus would bring CONNECTEDNESS between us as He saves and grows us into His image by the power of the Spirit!!

THAT is what Jesus does!!

- ONLY JESUS can save us from our selfish tendencies...
- ONLY JESUS can take our diverse gifts & passions & deploy them in a way that brings UNITY and CONNECTEDNESS!

The Body of Christ is diverse, unified, varied, complex—as varied as each of us are different...

- And YOUR calling, YOUR gifting—as different as it may be—is necessary!

1 Peter 4:10—Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Just as the early Church deployed a variety of gifts to further the mission—and continued to grow and glorify Jesus...

- so too should WE step up—each one of us—to serve and function in the empowered gifts that each of us has been given!

RVTA needs every one of us to step into our role and PARTICIPATE in the life of the Body!

- Each one of us has been given a gift...and they're not all the same—different!!
- Each of these gifts—each one of us—is necessary for the Body of Christ to function.
- **None of us are a Swiss Army knife—none of us are supposed to do it all!**
 - It is NECESSARY for this Body to have diverse parts.
 - AND each of our diverse gifts are connected—we work together—like an orchestra...

But who could POSSIBLY conduct this wild orchestra?? —Who would WANT to??

- With SO MANY different people, personalities, passions and priorities?
- With SO MANY strong opinions and perspectives represented here...

Each of us with a NECESSARY & DIFFERENT gift—WHO can bring order to such a chaotic idea?

- **King Jesus—the Prince of peace, the HEAD of the Church, JESUS brings unity!!**
- **JESUS brings peace!**

When King Jesus is ruling as head of the Body, each diverse giftings are connected in Jesus.

- One of the signs of God's Kingdom here on earth is that diverse, different people are unified!!
- Each of us are ESSENTIAL b/c of Jesus — DIVERSE — CONNECTED b/c we're in Jesus.

****PRAYER****

Jesus wants to bring His peace to Ventura County by activating each of us

- But before He asks you to share any gift or passion or talent that you may have...
- Jesus wants to give YOU a gift—the gift of God's love & forgiveness & wholeness & JOY.