

Gathered by the Holy Spirit, Fed with the WORD, Sent to make Christ known.

In the coming weeks we are going to be focusing on the book of Acts. Since we spent the year looking at the Gospel of Luke, Acts is actually the second half of the story. The Bible really messed things up. The New Testament should have been, Matthew, Mark, John, with Luke-Acts placed together. Acts is the extension of the Gospel of Luke and should be viewed with that in mind. We will touch on Pentecost after a few weeks, but after the day called Pentecost, we read the following in Acts 2:44-47

⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

This is seen as the classic picture of the perfect church. They had all things in common. This means it was a big Christian communion. You know what that means. It is not your big giant enormous flat screen TV. It is our TV. And all of us get to come to your house to watch it anytime we want.

They spent time in worship, sharing communion and meals with I quote, “glad and generous hearts”. They praised God and had goodwill of the community and the Lord added to their numbers. This sounds really, really good, doesn’t it? One reason they did all of this is that they thought Jesus was going to return shortly. But you know what mess’s things up? Humans. Now we fast forward 4 chapters and you know what you get. The first church fight. We are going to look at this verse by verse because it is a helpful reminder to us all for how we want to live and who we want to be as people of God. Essentially, what kind of Character do you want MLC to be?

So we read in Acts 6:1

“the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food.

You should not the Hellenists are not from Hell. It is taken from Helen of Troy and essentially means Greek Speaking Jews. Apparently the Greek Speaking Jews and the Hebrew Jews had divided into two camps and one camp was being neglected. Now through the years, I have heard and seen all kinds of church fights. Many of them having to do with the pastor of course. I remember one bishop telling me about a conflicted church that have burned through pastor after pastor and in 10 years had 5 pastors. They were complaining to him that he never sent them anyone good. He said, look, you have gone through 5 pastors in 10 years, how many people have you sent to

seminary. Occupational hazard, it is always the pastor's fault and not the churches. I have seen fights over color of carpet, drinking fountains and people throwing their egos around and being control freaks. So raise your hand if you have ever seen a church fight? Well in this Acts there was a legitimate concern. Widows were going hungry.

The first thing we can say is this, we can never address a problem unless we know about it. Now I can say some really stupid stuff. I make mistakes all the time. The church leadership does as well. But we can never seek forgiveness if we don't know about the problem?

So the twelve gathered and we read a response in verse 2

“It is not right that we should neglect the word of God to wait on tables”

This new movement had a sense of urgency. People had to go out into the world to tell others about the Risen Christ. This was the Apostles primary job. If they waited on tables, guess what, the movement would have died. This is a classic case of Nurture and Mission. On the one hand, we have to nurture the body of Christ and care for the community. On the other hand we are called to be God's Hands and feet and voice in the world. Focusing too much on Nurture, comes at the Expense of mission. It is not a matter of either or, it is always Nurture and Mission. Years ago Aid of Association for Lutherans did a massive ELCA wide church study. The question was raised, why do churches grow? Do you know what the number one answer was?

They wanted to grow

If you want to grow you will always keep one leg in nurture and one leg in mission. The neat think about MLC is as a mission church we are forced by necessity to grow. We are getting closer and closer to being self-funded but mission doesn't end when that happens. The biggest mistake that new mission starts do is to assume that their work is done once the building is built. Buildings are a tool for mission. It is community, the people of God that matters. So do we want to be a church that focuses on ourselves, or do we want to be a church with glad and generous hearts? Truthfully, we all need to ask ourselves that question and decide where we stand! Part of my role as pastor is continue to remind the people of God why we exist. This is why for the next few months or so we will recite our mission statement before the start of my message.

So how do they solve the problem? Well they do what any good Lutheran church would do. They formed a committee! We read on in verse 6:3

“Therefore friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to payer and to serving the word”

This is an amazing thing if you think about it. First of all the solution came from the body of believers. They did not just pick anyone. They picked people who had a faith, full of the Spirit and wisdom. They essentially picked people who the community could

trust. They were people of good standing. These people would be the ones who God has gifted for ministry and mission. Some people don't have the gifts to be Evangelists. But all people do have gifts for the sake of community. This is why we need everyone working together for the sake of the body of believers.

We then read the results of this decision of 6:7,

“The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith”.

When I was in Mukwonago, Wisconsin we would meet once a month with a group of pastors and staff for lunch to discuss ministry. We would decide on a topic and brainstorm practical ways to grow our congregations. The topic came up about youth behavior and problems that come with youth ministry. One of the youth ministers had gone on several mission trips with students. He said this:

I never had a problem with youth as long as we all understood the mission

If the kids understood it wasn't about them, it was about helping a family in need, everyone worked together for the same goal. Do you think we can see our Christian community in the same manner? I like to keep things simple. Jesus is Primary. Mission is Primary. Caring for ourselves is Primary. How we do it, and all the little things that cause conflicts just distract us. As any business model would say, Major in the Majors, and keep the Minors to a Minimum. Now, let's open ourselves to the Spirit and watch what God does with MLC! Amen.