

“Helping Hands”

Psalm 32; Acts 6:1-7

July 7, 2024

Introduction

- Early on in ministry, I had a really tight peer group.
- We met every Wednesday at Panera Bread in Gastonia to discuss our sermons.
 - o Over the course of time, we became good friends.
- But one of our guys, Mike, was in a struggling church.
 - o But they’d attracted a young woman with her four daughters, all under the age of 14.
 - o They came, every Sunday, despite the church not having a real Sunday school for the kids.
 - o Things seemed to be going quite well.
 - But then, something happened.
- What happened was a “Ladies Tea.”
 - o Seems harmless enough, right?
 - o But you see, it wasn’t.
 - Some of the ladies wanted it to be just for a select group of women.
 - So, they purposefully de-invited this young woman and her daughters from coming
 - What do you think happened after that?
 - o Needless to say, that family never returned.
 - o That church?
 - It’s now closed, by the way.
 - Good call, right?
 - o Now I’m not saying that was the only decision that led to their demise but it certainly didn’t help.
 - Churches, at times, make bad decisions corporately.
 - o It happens.
 - o The church that I was recently at suffered yet another blow up.
 - o Another church spun out of their ranks.
 - o Churches sometimes make bad decisions and they think they’re making them for the right reasons. But they’re not.

The Early Church

- One of the things that we see very clearly here in Acts is a church that is functioning well.
- How do we know?
 - o Growth
 - Healthy things grow, there’s movement and expansion and energy from it.
- The Church in Acts was dynamic, vibrant and people-oriented.
 - o What do I mean by “people-oriented”?
 - Well, on at least two occasions now we’re told that the church is living communally, that they’re sharing all of their goods together.
 - We even get a warning story, Ananias and Sapphira.
 - o The church was arranged to share the Gospel and meet the physical needs of its members.
 - But something was happening that wasn’t right.
- The Widows
 - o The community, which at the time would’ve been about 10,000 people, had several widows in their midst.
 - Widows, in the ancient world especially, were marginalized people, living on the edges of society.
 - o And while the people were sharing everything, an imbalance was happening.
 - You see, while everyone would’ve been Jewish, some would’ve been from the Diaspora, and would’ve spoken Greek as opposed to Hebrew.
 - They would’ve also had slightly different customs but they were still JEWS.
 - o They were being overlooked in the food distribution.
- This crisis created a controversy.

The Church Faces Drama

- Every church over time faces a fair amount of controversy.
- In fact, in one of the papers I read preparing for this sermon told the story of a church that broke up
 - o What a sad, thing right?
 - o Well, this was years ago in Texas and, when the fighting started, it went quickly to the court system.
 - There it was discovered that the precipitating event in this entire church's break up was, no kidding, that one of the Elders had been served a smaller piece of ham than a child one fellowship supper.
 - No kidding. That set the whole thing off.
- I've not been in a church yet that hasn't faced its share of concerns.
 - o Some, as I've said, were largely destroyed through them.
 - I came through a Presbyterian Church with a 50-year pastor. The pastor after him wasn't me but the church didn't like that guy so it schussed the church.
 - I came through a non-denomination church that wanted to grow so badly that they ran off an entire congregation only to fall flat on their faces.
 - o Others though limp though and along for about 10 years.
 - Believe it or not, after a church controversy, it generally takes about 10 years for a church to fully recover.
 - I can testify to the truth of that through a number of congregations now.
- So that the early church faced this, it isn't really surprising.
 - o We're all just bozos on the same bus, we make mistakes and we often get our feeling hurt in the process.
- What did the early Church do?

The Early Church's Response

- First, they prioritized what they were doing.
 - o The preaching of the Word and the evangelization of Jerusalem.
 - This was the primary purpose.
 - It's all churches primary purpose although there is always a drift away from it.
 - o The early church wasn't to be swayed.
 - o Well, it wasn't the case that they weren't going to deal with this situation, they also agreed that it wasn't significant enough of a deal to divert the people from praying and spreading the Gospel.
 - That is to say that some people were expected to keep doing what they were doing.
 - But now, another avenue for service arose in the church.
 - The Diaconate
- The first Deacons
 - o Were chosen for their abilities and for their kindness.
 - o One among them was a convert, a previously non-Jewish man showing early on the embrace of the outsider.
 - o These men were chosen to make sure that the food distribution was going well & equitably.
 - o This service was a three-fold blessing.
 - First, it allowed the evangelical work of the church to continue.
 - Second, it allowed for the proper distribution of food.
 - Third, it allowed for the growth of servants within the church.
- That's right, the biggest blessing came for the men who got to do the deeds.
 - o Whenever you work in the service of the Lord, you get the greatest blessings of all.
 - A closer walk with Jesus which makes all your steps feel secure.

Church Service

- This would ordinarily be where a pastor would lament the 80/20 rule in churches.
 - o This tongue in cheek term refers to the fact that 20% of the people in churches are often doing 80% or more of the work.

- I can rather happily say that such an effect is not present in our church although there are still some people who do loads of work. Don't miss that, we have some mega-servants here but we all serve.
- Our problem, is that we're so engaged in doing our church service, that we often neglect our work of evangelism.
 - o We're supposed to be sharing the Word in the world as well as taking care of inter church business.
 - And we're doing some of that and we're going to get a little better.
 - NEW EMPLOYEE
 - o Going to work with our kids, our Playschool and working on social media to see more people visit and join our church.
 - It's a big task and one she won't be able to do on her own.
- But service in the church is a blessing.

Serving the Church

- Cook's has its share of saints but I can't really speak about y'all while I'm here, right?
- I've been fortunate to work with some amazing servants within the church.
- Nancy story
- Griefshare ministry
- Growth in Christ, strengthening assurance, better equipped to handle troubles.