

Acts 6 | When the Church Grows

Crossroads Brooklyn

1/21/18

INTRODUCTION

When I was a kid.... I used to get made fun for being short. I was a runt. I was always self-conscious about it.

- It affected my ability at different sports. I was never big enough to really be that good.
- When you are in middle school that is hard. Girls were taller than me.
 - (I used to be like the kid in “Big.”) - Every birthday wish. Every penny I threw in the fountain... Every Zoltar Machine... “I wish I were big.”
 - I used to listen to that old Skee-Lo song... “I wish I was a little bit taller / I wish I was a baller”

Then, one year it happened. Seemingly out of nowhere.... From seventh grade to eighth grade, I remember going through a massive growth spurt.

- In the span of one year, I went from being the shortest kid in my class... To being one of the tallest.
- I started winning all my track races that year... My dad always joked that I didn’t actually get any faster, my stride just got longer....

But one of the things I remember most about that year... Was the pain.... The growing pains.

- Waking up in the middle of the night, my legs in so much pain.
- Wearing Osgood-Schlatter braces on both knees...
- It was painful. I couldn’t sleep... My abs would be sore.

I learned that year... That growth is a lot of fun... But it can also be painful.

This morning, I want us to look at Acts 6.... A story of the early church... Going through an enormous growth spurt... The church was growing so fast... The Holy Spirit was saving people.

- But as amazing as it was... There were growing pains.

People often talk about the early church. It was organic. They were a family. Devoted themselves to apostles teaching. Breaking of bread, cared for the poor.

- But I want you to see that the early church wasn’t perfect... It had problems... And Acts 6 shows us how they sought to work through these problems so they could continue to thrive into the future.

Before we get to our text, Acts 6.... We have to set the context...

Narrative of Acts

In Acts 1, the resurrected Christ himself tells his followers, there’s about 120 of them.

Jesus gives this small church their mission strategy.

Acts 1:8 paraphrase - *“Not too long from now, you are going to receive power when my Spirit comes upon you.... When that happens, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.”*

- After he says this... He ascends into Heaven.

- Now, the church is waiting for the Holy Spirit to come upon them, so they can begin their mission of taking the message of Jesus to the world.

Acts 2, They are all together in one place.... On the day of Pentecost... The Holy Spirit falls on them like a mighty rushing wind.

- Peter stands up in Jerusalem... And begins preaching a sermon from the book of Joel...
- He tells all these people in Jerusalem from all different backgrounds.... To repent and believe in the resurrection of Jesus... And be baptized.

In one sermon.... On one day, three thousand people place their faith in Jesus and join the church in Jerusalem. The church grows from 120 to over 3,000 in one day.

- So... Here is this community of 120 Xians... They were a family... They were all close... It was a great church.
 - But then, in an instant, the HS grows their church by three-thousand people.
 - They don't know everybody's names anymore... The church changed

As this rapidly growing community, they are trying to care for another. Take of each other's needs. Preach the Bible. Take communion. Pray together...

- All the while, the church keeps growing... People all over Jerusalem are attracted to these Xians and are convinced of the message of Jesus...

This is a beautiful story of God pouring out his favor on a group of believers... On a church.

- And honestly, I pray all the time... For God's spirit to send this kind of revival to Crossroads...

While we haven't seen this type of growth at Crossroads... We don't have three thousand people... We're still a very small church... But God is blessing our congregation in some incredible ways.

- People are coming to faith in Jesus. / We're being more generous.
- Our church is growing... Last week, **147** people in worship. The year before, **73**, the year before, **62**, the year before that **46**.
 - This is great news! We're still a relatively small church, but God is adding people to our number every day.

A GROWING CHURCH IS SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE

I know some of you, you started coming to this church because it was a small family (and still is). You could know everyone. Be involved in all of the decisions.

- And for those of you who were around when there were 46 people, that was a beautiful thing. But as the church has grown some of you look around and you think I don't these people... And maybe that makes you a little sad.
- Or maybe a decision about something was made and you think, "Why wasn't I asked about this?" I used to be involved in all these decisions.... And that makes you feel a little sad. The church has changed a little bit as it has grown.

It's easy sometimes to see church growth as something to be feared... "I don't want to go to a big church, I want to go to a small church." Or "I liked this church better when it was smaller and I knew everyone."

- I totally understand that sentiment.
- But I want you to hear me today... The goal and mission of Crossroads is not to be a small church.
- I also want you to hear that.... The goal and mission is not to be a big church.
 - The goal of the church is to be a healthy, Spirit-Filled church. And to receive the people that God gives us with open hands.

This is what the church in Acts did... They continued to preach the message of Jesus, without fear of offending anyone... They weren't trying to soften the message, so more people would accept them....

- But they also kept striving to reach and make room for more people. And pray that God would send them.
- That's what a healthy, Spirit-Filled church does... That's what we are always going to do.

ACTS 6

But when God sends growth, it can be painful....

- The church here in Jerusalem... Grew so fast... And it presented some issues...

NT Wright – *“Already in the early days, Jesus’ followers faced problems about how to run things. From the beginning they had shared their resources, a sign that they were called to live as a single family. But how is that going to work when the family is suddenly 30 times the size you expected it to be?”*

This is where we get to our Scripture today.

[1] Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. [2] And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”

So here is what happened: The church in Jerusalem grew so fast... From 120 to a megachurch overnight...

- When they were 120, there were 12 people that basically led the church: The Apostles. Their job was to preach the Bible. Pray for the people in the church. Shepherd the congregation. They were pastors.
 - But they also had to do the administrative/business stuff that happens when you are dealing with organizing a group of people... Organize meeting places... They had to handle finances... They cared for the poor. They ran the widow ministry.

That was fine when the church was small. Very manageable... But as the church grew... That leadership structure was impossible.

Eventually a crisis arose... In the early church, they had.... What was essentially a Meals on Wheels ministry for Widows in the church.... The Apostles would have daily distribution of food to women in need.

- The Hellenists, which were Greek-born, Greek-speaking Christians, said... “Hey, wait a minute.... All the Hebrew/Jewish widows seem to be getting their portions everyday... But our widows... Aren’t getting their share... What gives?”

So, this was the first major conflict in the early church. I heard one pastor say, “*was an unorganized cafeteria line.*”

- That is certainly an oversimplification... But in some ways it helps us see...
- The church essentially outgrew its leadership structure.

The Hellenist Xians bring this issue to the Apostles... The Apostles are heartbroken... They don’t want anyone to be neglected.

- They come to the realization, that they were stretched too thin. They dropped the ball.
- Their primary job description was to preach the Bible (ministry of the Word) and prayer. That is the job description of a pastor.
 - But they were now doing all these other things...It comes to a point, where they can’t do it all.
 - The Apostles said, “We love the church’s widow ministry, but it involves so much work that it is taking away from our time to study the Bible, and pray with people in the church.”
- We need to change our leadership structure... We need more people involved... We need to appoint people to the ministry of “serving tables.” So that we can continue with the ministry of the Word.

[3] Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. [4] But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” [5] And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, [...then six more Greek dudes] [6] These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

[7] And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

So they made a job description. We’re looking for seven men that meet these qualifications: Full of wisdom and full of the spirit. **Super-smart and Spirit-Filled.**

- So they appointed seven men to lead the ministry of serving tables... The Apostles changed the leadership structure and delegated responsibility.

Another thing that is not a small detail about this story:

- While this issue was at its core an organizational issue... They were disorganized.
- Race was also involved.
- The Apostles were all Hebrews... And it was the Greek women that were being neglected.
 - This was a very diverse church (much like ours), but the leadership was all Jewish. And this caused problems.
- They didn’t intend to be racist... It is obvious from the way the church loved one another that they loved on another.

- But the leaders of the church were of different background than others in the church. They had their cultural blinders that kept them from ministering to the hearts of the Hellenist Xians in a way that ensured they were fully cared for.
- It wasn't intentional... But it happened.

Don't miss this... The way they worked to make sure that the Hellenists were cared for... They put Hellenists in leadership.

- They were a diverse church... And at their first business meeting, where they named deacons... They made sure that they would be a diverse leadership.

WHAT DOES THE EARLY CHURCH HAVE TO DO WITH CROSSROADS?

Well, much like the church in Jerusalem... We are a church that is growing... And a church that is diverse.

- By God's grace, right now, there are no major conflicts that threaten the health of our church family... And it seems that we are all unified in our mission.

But, as a growing church... We do have growing pains... Let me tell you about those.

Once again, growth is something to celebrate: And no area of our church has grown like our KIDS ministry in the last year.

- We have so many kids. It's amazing. But as that has happened, the number of children in our church has grown at a much faster rate than the number of adults.
- In fact, on any given Sunday, 33% of church are Elementary age and under.
 - That means that about 40% of our church (when you count kids team volunteers) is in another part of the building right now.
 - There is a whole other worship service happening down the hallway with our children.

This is one of my favorite things about Crossroads. That we have so many children. My kids have made so many friends here...

- Not only that, we have an amazing kids team that teaches our kids to know and love God. **Illus.** – Edith acting out the Bible stories. Washing my feet. Flipping over tables.
- This isn't babysitting, this is ministry. We are putting the Word of God into our children.

All of that said. Because of the amazing growth our KIDS ministry has experienced, we are short of volunteers. A few people are doing the majority of the ministry to our children.

- Just like the Book of Acts, we need new people to step up and serve in this area.
- It's an incredible opportunity to invest in the next generation. But it's also a great need. And we need people to rise to meet this need. (Men, women, young, old).
 - You can sign up at Next Steps Table. We have an easy onboarding process, where you can be quickly trained.

Leadership

Another issue is: we are at a point in our growth as a church, where it looks as if we need to readjust our leadership structure.

- In the past, we have had a small team of elders that have essentially been responsible for all aspects of the church. Including administrative decisions, financial decisions, ministry decisions.
- We're at a point now, where one small team can't make all those decisions effectively. It's too much. We're stretched thin.

So, several months ago, we formed what we called a **Ministry Leader's Council**... Which is where we took all of our Ministry Team Leader's (Worship, Kids, CR, First Impressions, Outreach, Growth Groups). And we scheduled a monthly meeting where we pray through each of these ministry areas. Plan the ministry year. In many ways, **doing the ministry of the Word**.

As this happened, we saw that our Elder Board was focusing more on details of administration, personnel, budget...

- As this happened, we saw that "ministry of the Word" decisions were being made by the MLC.
- While the nitty gritty details of church organization were being made by our elder board.

Well, as we see in the Book of Acts. Deacons are tasked with taking care of the details of the church, so that the Apostles (eventually, the NT will call them Pastors/Elders) can spend their energies on the ministry of the Word.

We realized that in some ways, our elder board was functioning like deacons... While Kyle and I, the pastors, were leading this Ministry Leader's team that was doing the "Ministry of the Word."

- At the same time, Ryan Stockton's elder term came to an end. And Jim French's elder term is up in a few months.
- So, we made a decision, that will be presented at our Family Meeting after the service.

Where, in May, when Jim French's elder term is up, our existing Elder Board will transition into a deacon board. The job description will change to reflect that the purpose of the deacons to handle the nitty gritty details of the church.

- We will soon begin receiving nominations for whom would be most suited to serve in the role of deacon. People who are "**Super-Smart and Spirit-Filled**" (Full of wisdom and filled the with Spirit)

Then, our pastoral team, Kyle and I, will continue to serve in our roles as pastors... And we will lead the MLC which will be responsible for the Ministry of the Word.

And just like the church in Jerusalem. We are a very diverse church. And our leadership does not reflect that diversity to the same degree.

- So just as the church in Acts 6 did, when we start receiving nominations for this deacon board... We will be committed to making sure that our leadership begins to look like the congregation.
- We don't want metaphorical Hellenist widows being neglected. So we want to bring a greater diversity to leadership onto our team so that we can minister to everyone effectively.

All of that was a sneak peek of the Family Meeting...

- But we're at the tail end of a series called "GeneroUS."
- We've been talking about Jesus's commands for Xians to be financially generous people. To give sacrificially to the work of the church.
 - In the last two weeks, there have been some amazing stories of generosity.

But what does Acts 6... What does this sermon have to do with being generous?

A GROWING CHURCH NEEDS GENEROUS PEOPLE

In the book of Acts... This church was growing so fast... And at the time, a few people were doing all the work.

- The church realized very quickly, that a church can't work like that.
- For a church to thrive... Everyone needs to be on board. Be on the team.
- Find a place to use your time, talent, treasures.

Just like these seven Greek men generously stepped up, gave their time, and filled a ministry need in their church. We need everyone in this church to step up and do the same.

- We certainly need everyone to be financially generous. We've talked about that for the last two weeks.
- But we need everyone to be generous with their time and talent as well.
 - So that we can ensure that no children are neglected... No one in need is neglected. No FTG ever shows up without being greeted.
 - Some of you have musical talent, you haven't told anyone... We need your gift in this church to minister to us.
- **As you leave today, Next Steps Table...** If you aren't already serving begin praying about how you can serve.

And here is what happens when everyone gets on board and is generous with their service...

AND THE WORD OF GOD INCREASED

[7] And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

- When I look back on 2018 in 12 months from now... I would love for this to be the verse that summarizes our year.

That as everyone in the church played our part. As everyone gave what we had. Our generosity would lead to a healthier, more Spirit-filled church... Where the Word of God continued to increase.

You see, the church is called to be the hands and feet of Jesus... His body here on this earth.

- We are called to model together the love of Jesus to one another and the world.
- Jesus was generous with all he had. He gave his life. He gave his time. To make it possible for us to be saved.

As we move into a time of communion... [Share the gospel]

PRAY WITH ME