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We Are The Church: Community

Acts 6:1-7

6Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ²And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word." ⁵What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. ⁷The 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.

(Slide 1: We Are The Church: Community)

A few years back, my family had a hard couple of years. Between my husband and I we had experienced 5 pay cuts over the course of 2 years, so I started working 2 jobs to make ends meet. Like a lot of families we were just barely keeping all the balls in the air. As long as nobody got sick, or nothing special came up we could mostly make it work... Then the straw that broke the camel's back came in the form of a parent letter from the dance studio, stating that all parents were required to volunteer for the dance recital in order for their child to participate. I was working so many evenings and weekends that I didn't even know if I was going to be able to attend the recital, much less be a stage mom! I was clutching that camel straw of a letter, on the verge of tears, when my husband, Tom came home from work and said the magic words: I already took care of that."

One of the options for volunteering was to solicit ads for the program, so he took the letter to his Chamber of Commerce meeting that he had to go to for work anyway, and pulled in 4 ads just like that!

As the relief washed over me, I realized that half the overwhelming anxiety of the situation was thinking that I had to do it all myself. Bring home the bacon, fry it up in the pan, and be a dance mom. Which was really an kind of an insult to my wonderful, Christian, husband who was thinking, much more correctly, that God has called us to be in this life together. And when we share the load, it often gets lighter because what's hard for me, might be super easy for him, and vice versa.

(Slide 2: “day by day God added to the community of those who were being saved.)

The Apostles encountered a very similar problem in the early church. After the day of pentecost the church grew and grew.

Acts 2:41 tells us that 3000 new members were baptized after the day of Pentecost,

After Peter and John were put on trial before the Temple Council, Acts 4:4 records the number of believers at about 5000

The Apostles showed up, paid attention, cooperated with God and as it says in Acts 2:47, “day by day God added to the community of those who were being saved.”

The Apostles were just riding the wave of the Holy Spirit, which was wonderful! But it was also a little overwhelming.

They were used to dealing with crowds and caring for the poor and managing the larger group of Disciples when Jesus was embodied and doing the preaching, but now that God was manifesting in Spirit instead of in flesh the Apostles had to take up the work of teaching as well administration and caring for the poor and there were many more people to care for!

Growth is amazing and exciting, but growth presents challenges too!

The Apostles did something really smart. They realized that Jesus had shown them how to include others in the ministry of the kingdom of God when:

Before they fully understood the gospel Jesus sent them out, two by two to share it.

Before they had fully learned to have compassion for the least of these Jesus assigned them to feed people and welcome children.

Before they really understood the compassion and power of God Jesus sent them out to heal and cast out demons, and when they got in over their heads Jesus helped them, coached them and sent them back to work.

Jesus didn't expect the Apostles to be experts before he called them to serve. The gospel books, especially Mark, are filled with stories of the Apostles being confused and just not getting it! Jesus only asked them to show up, pay attention, cooperate with God and release the outcome to God's control.

So the Apostles turned to the community, and I find this part really interesting.

(Slide 3: select from among yourselves” (people of) good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.” Acts 6:3))

The Apostles turned to the community of believers, and said, “select from among yourselves” (people of) good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.”

The Apostles didn't hand pick the best and the brightest to craft their dream team of deacons.

They asked the community to help identify people who were full of the Spirit -- people who were already cooperating with God.

And then they entrusted these Spirit-filled, but completely inexperienced people, to continue to cooperate with God.

And it turned out OK.

“The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and (it even worked well enough that) a great many of the priests (who actually knew how to run things well, must have felt they were doing a good enough job, because the priests) became obedient to the faith (too).” (Acts 6:7)

It’s so easy to fall into the trap of thinking that we’re on our own in life. To think that we just have to find a way to do it all by ourselves and do it all perfectly!

The longer I get to know God, the more I’m coming to believe, maybe even to trust, that God is not expecting me to be Perfect, or to Do it All by myself.

(Slide 4: What if... we reach out to our community of support and focus on being Spirit-filled instead of perfect.)

Maybe we don’t need to keep beating ourselves up for not being able to do everything, because God has given us a community -- God has given us each other, to share the load and share our gifts with.

And maybe we don’t need to be perfect experts at everything. Maybe we just need to cooperate with God and allow the Spirit to fill our lives and overflow into abundant outcomes.

Maybe we can take a deep breath... and do what the Apostles did. Reach out to our community of support and focus on being spirit filled instead of on being perfect.

Then show up with our community, pay attention together, cooperate with God and release the outcome.

Children’s Message:

Who are your favorite Super heros?

Why?

I always liked the Justice League or the Avengers, because one superhero is great, but together they can do a lot more!

You know what, you already are a part of a Justice League... the church.
Because God gives us all abilities -- not like flying and super strength...

More like the ability to fix things or help people, which I think is pretty super!

And when we all work together we can do some pretty super things -- like the sack lunches for Clackamas service Center -- Messy church put the stickers on the bags, your Sunday School classes put in the cookies and apples and some folks gathered to make sandwiches, and another person delivered them -- and Norma used her super organizing skills to help us work together!

You may not be able to fly, but we all have the power to do super things when we cooperate with God and one another.

Let's pray:

Thank you God, for giving us, the super power, to do good things together. Amen.