

Sunday July 18, 2021  
Lesson 7: Inside Out  
Scripture: Acts 6: 1-7

**Context:**

This week we continue our series for the summer titled Respond as we dive into another section focusing on how to live with the people who live next door. Last week we learned from the Old Testament how God worked through the life of Ruth and demonstrated the importance of living with those who are different than us. This week we jump to the book of Acts in the New Testament and explore how the early church discerned how to best care for members in need. In the process, the early church also demonstrated how to come out of conflict with core values respected and trust shared between all groups.

The text begins with a wonderful problem for the church to experience. As the Christian movement spreads, the number of disciples continue to increase. Yet with such a movement of diverse people joining them, there is the inevitable conflict to arise. The Hellenists (Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora) feel their widows are being neglected in the distribution of goods.<sup>1</sup> The church has continued the tradition of taking care of the poor and vulnerable as they did in the synagogue, yet as the movement grows with diversity and numbers, the distribution has become unmanageable.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the conflict becomes multilayered as the leaders represent one group and there are others who are trying to find their place in the system.

The Twelve call together a meeting of the disciples and decide the issue is one of administration connected to mission. As a result, there is a need for leaders to help them organize and lead in this area of ministry. Thus, they have the people from which the complaint arose to choose seven well respected men endowed with wisdom to focus on the issue at hand so the apostles may continue to plan and lead in worship. Their decision plays an important role in what will become a central leadership tenet to the church: leadership within the church arises from the community's quite mundane but utterly necessary functional needs.<sup>3</sup> These individuals are called by God and affirmed by the church to lead in the task.

The next part of the text moves to the seven being chosen and then these individuals being presented to the apostles. They have hands laid upon them for this task and the church continues to flourish. This act shows another leadership principle for the church: the church creates certain types of leadership for the community to function.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> William Willimon, "Acts," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

These individuals were needed in this time and they were publicly affirmed for what needed to happen for the church to excel.

### **Application**

Conflict is something to happen in every relationship, every institution, and every community. Unless someone possesses an unusually weak backbone, many people in leadership positions will tell you how they've seen conflict lead to some type of change, hopefully for the better. Healthy conflict can lead to a stronger mission and purpose for all parties involved.

Fortunately for us today, we read of how conflict leads the church to grow both spiritually and numerically. All parties were able to be represented and the church continued with mission and their core values being preserved. The church thrived from this conflict as they learned more about themselves and what was important to them.

The first lesson we glean from today is the importance of the church learning to take care of others, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. As the text emphasizes, there was the expectation the church would continue the tradition of the synagogue to take care of those in need, especially the widows. When there seemed to be some who were overlooked, the church discerned there was a need to make sure the distribution was fair and equal.

The text reminds us of how core values in the church lead us to find mission opportunities where God is calling us to take care of others, regardless of what they look like or what group they belong to. If there is a need, all should be given the opportunity to receive gifts and blessings. For churches, we are reminded to seek ways we can be in ministry with all people, even those who do not look like or maybe even sound like us. Just as the early church discovered, the temptation might be to focus on our needs or to advocate for those belonging to our tribe. Yet there is a distinct call to be in ministry with others.

The second lesson we glean from today is how conflict can lead us to new places together and even new forms of ministry. The Twelve were learning how the diversity of the church could be a challenge. You had this group who wanted to do things one way, and this group wanted to go another direction. As the church grew, they found themselves taking on numerous responsibilities and then discovering how they were stretched thin. They needed to have more voices at the table and they needed to delegate some of their responsibility to new leaders.

These church leaders discovered something we all find on the road to ministry. At times, you need to equip others to go in God's name to do the things needed to be done. You might be interested or even good at certain functions, but you know that if you keep up at a certain rate, you will be burnt out and unable to be fully present.

At times we in the church might be called to not get involved in a conflict. Or if we are involved in the conflict, we might need to let others step up to the plate and demonstrate their own gifts figuring out things they haven't learned before. And other times, there is the need to see what the values are present and how we are called to work together as a team to be in mission and live into the vision.

All of these options are valid and different seasons call for us to do different things. Yet as we see in the early church, you can feel the Spirit moving when people are heard, all leaders are respected, and there is openness in how decisions are made. When

we as the church learn to see how God has knit us together, we can do incredible things in God's kingdom.

What is a ministry you see in your church which seeks to take care of the poor and the vulnerable? Why do you think God calls us to see conflict as a way for all to grow? When have you seen conflict lead to better discernment of values and a clearer vision for life or ministry? How can equipping others allow for them to grow? Why is important to communicate and be open in the midst of conflict?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009