

Divide or Multiply - Acts 6:1-7
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

Math is not my thing. I found a way in school to get a passing grade, but never really liked any of my math classes and it never really sank in. My sister on the other hand, well, she is a math teacher. And my son Josiah is a math whiz. He tells me he thinks in math, which makes no sense to me at all. One thing I do remember about math is that I always preferred doing multiplication rather than division. Division turned into fractions, and just the idea of breaking something up into smaller pieces felt complicated and pointless. And it took too much mental energy to do it in my head. Never mind how many pieces were left, just give me the whole cherry pie. Multiplication, though, was easier, and it meant more. Our story in Acts this week begins and ends by telling us that the church was multiplying, adding more disciples to this first church in Jerusalem. Yet, the story points to a time in this early church when they were in danger of dividing.

We have to roll up our sleeves and go a little deeper into the language to see what actually happens. On the surface, the story is about how the church cared for the poor, specifically widows and that they chose to raise up new leaders to assist the Apostles in this task. On one level, this is the precursor to the roles of Elders and Deacons in a local church. The Apostles had to stay dedicated to prayer and the ministry of the Word, meanwhile, the seven selected would invest in this ministry to widows. In the local church, the Elders are overseers who give themselves to the ministry of the Word and to prayer, leading the church with their lips. Deacons lead out with their hands, giving themselves to the “waiting of tables” in a local congregation. This multiplication of leaders is so important in Jerusalem, and at Genesis. This is why we developed our Leadership 222 class, a leadership development track that meets for 9 months to develop leaders here at Genesis.

But there is another layer that had the potential to wreck the early movement, and has a lot to do with the leaders who were chosen. We are told the problem began with Hellenistic Jews complaining about favoritism toward Hebraic Jewish widows in the efforts to care for their needs. At first reading, it seems to be about language difference, with Hellenistic Jews speaking Greek and Hebraic Jews speaking Aramaic, the native tongue of Jerusalem. Yet, this division between Hellenists and Hebraic Jews in Jerusalem was much more than language. The cultural and political fault lines for the culture was about this very issue. For over 400 years, since the Babylonian conquest and exile (see the book of Daniel) Israel had been under the oppression of foreign regimes. At the same time, Jews ended up spreading out all over the Greco-Roman world. During the 200 years before the New Testament they were under the rule of the Greek and then the Roman empires. During the Hellenistic period, the Greeks spread their way of thinking and living in the world, and Greek became the common language in the Empire. In Jerusalem the majority of Hebrews refused to embrace Hellenism and rejected the Greek language, seeing it as an accommodation to culture. On the other hand, Jews who lived in other cultures knew nothing else, and furthermore, they could see the benefits brought about by the Greeks and more so the Romans, who began to build roads, aqueducts, temples, and so much more. In Israel, every socio-religious-political tribe (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, Herodians...) was formed in some response to the growing secularization of the culture that came with Hellenism. Here is the point, at this moment in Acts the church has the potential to split along the same fault lines that divided the culture. If this were to happen the multiplication of the Gospel would be harmed and the church would be wounded. The Apostles, though, bring this early church together to focus on the

Gospel, their mission to make disciples, prayer, and the need to do justice and mercy. This church easily could have split into two factions. Or the church could have gotten stuck into one of two ditches. Some might have said, “Just preach the Gospel and don’t worry about these widows.” Yet care for widows, orphans, and sojourners is commanded in the Scripture. On the other hand, this level of care could have pulled the church off its mission. The solution allowed greater focus for the Apostles for their leadership in the Gospel and prayer, and at the same time assured the care of all. And there is a very interesting facet of the solution. Every man chosen for this “table waiting” ministry has a Greek name. The solution gave voice to the minority culture in the church, and they made sure that all people were equally loved and served. This is how the church in that culture, and in ours can multiply rather than divide.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Jeremiah 8	Jeremiah 9	Jeremiah 10	Jeremiah 11	Jeremiah 12	Jeremiah 13	Jeremiah 14

Reading from this past week: Acts 6:1-7

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: Acts 6:8-7:53

Family Worship

Song - *Rock of Ages*

<https://youtu.be/uHlTMGbGLjA>

Gospel Project

Unit: A Pattern of Disobedience

Story: Eli’s sons disobey God

Big Picture Question: What is the fair payment for sin?

Answer: The fair payment for sin is death.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 4-6

New City Catechism

Question #21: What sort of Redeemer is needed to bring us back to God?

Answer: One who is truly human and also truly God.

Verse: Isaiah 9:6

Scripture

Acts 6:1-7

- Who are the Hellenists and Hebrews and why does this matter in the story? What are some of our cultural fault lines that threaten to divide the church?
- Which is more important, the ministry of the Word or care for those who are suffering and poor? Why must the Gospel compel us to reject an either/or answer?
- How does the Apostles solution keep the church from dividing?
- Why does any church need to have a plan for multiplying leaders if it intends to multiply disciples?

Prayer

*Pray for the unity of our church around the Gospel and God’s mission.

*Pray for all of the leaders in our church, give thanks for them. And if there are leaders who have blessed you recently send him or her a note.