

Building Leaders, Acts 6:7

Series: The Early Days

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We are part of a rich church history. I can get lost for hours in Ancestry.com, discovering old relatives. My imagination can go wild. I discovered there is a town named after my family. It is Myerstown, PA. ***Mr. Isaac Meier married Mr. Herclerode's daughter, Catherine, and bought the home and plantation. The home is located near the Tulpehocken Creek and the town was later known as Tulpehocken Town. Tulpehocken is a Lenape Indian word which means "land of the turtles". Mr. Meier laid out the streets for his town in 1768.***

In July of 1770, Mr. Meier was shot and killed in a local tavern and his murderer was never found. After Mr. Meier died, his town gradually became known as Meier-Town, in tribute to him. After a while, the spelling of the name took on an English form of Myer rather than the German form of Meier.

Our spiritual ancestors are just as important as our physical ones. For instance in Romans 4:1 Paul calls Abraham “our forefather according to the flesh” and later in 4:17, “He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed...”

Over the next several weeks I plan to introduce you to some spiritual leaders from the early days of the church. These are our spiritual ancestors. These are people who carried the faith, the gospel message in word and deed, and made it possible for us to be Christians today. Without their contributions-many of them considerable, we would not be sitting here today.

Out text today is Acts 6:1-7, *1 In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word." 5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 So the word of God*

spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

- “In those days...” We find ourselves in a series of church-days. I grew up hearing the phrase “New Testament church.” Not the “Reformation church” or the “Catholic Church” but the NT church-the early church, the first churches planted. Our focus was on “in those days.”
- A time of great spiritual and numerical growth for the church. This also drew our attention back to those days. We assumed they were doing something right to be growing so fast, and we are, by contrast, doing something wrong.
- A crisis produced growth in leadership. Isn’t this how it often is.
 - Military: Why do we have George Washington? Revolution.
 - Government: Why do we have Abraham Lincoln? Division
 - Business: Why do we have Edison? Darkness
 - Sports: A losing season will get you a first round draft pick.
 - Medicine: How did we get Louis Pasteur? Germs
- The issue within the issue: This was bigger than just some widows who were not being fed. This crisis threatened the unity and stability of the church. Hellenistic Jews were Jews who had grown up outside of Israel, within a Greek culture. The Hebraic Jews’ experience was mostly limited to Israel. Like conservatives and liberals. They cared about different things, and viewed the world through different lens. The question was “is the church tent big enough for all kinds of people?”
- The challenge of leadership:
 - Apostles: Stay focused on prayer and the word. This was important because every person in the body of Christ needed the same support from God and the same food, the word of God. Attention to a specific crisis didn’t mean important matters did not matter, and should be set aside for the sake of the crisis.
 - Delegation: However, the crisis had to be addressed, and addressed in a serious way. How was that done?
 - Involving the entire church. “The Twelve gathered all the disciples together....” This was a church crisis, not just a leadership crisis.
 - Appointing the best of the best to handle this crisis:
 - Full of the Spirit
 - Full of Wisdom
 - Full of Faith
 - Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, & Nicolas-all Hellenistic Jews. (You can tell by their names.)
 - Formal delegation: Laying on of hands
- Outcome: The word of God spread, numbers increased rapidly, and even priests became obedient to the faith

What is our take away? When crises in the church are handled appropriately and the leadership does not lose focus on the most important matters, the church will both produce more leaders and will grow.