

Today we are looking at a short but significant passage documenting the importance of **teamwork** in the local church. There are a lot of contexts in which we experience a team working together effectively. It may be synergy in sport, resulting in a memorable win – such as **Crosby’s “golden goal”** (2/28/2010). Yes, teamwork can be transcendent...yet even when functioning well, we can face great tragedy.

Proposition

We are on a journey through the book of Acts following the Gospel as it **rippled** out from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. Last Sunday we considered how to remain undeterred despite setbacks and challenges, whether they are **internal or external** to the Church. And we were reminded that authentic Christian community is the “final apologetic” testifying to life in Christ.

Today we see the “apologetic” of teamwork in Acts 6. The first half records a practical problem that required a team approach. The second part sets the scene for the martyrdom of Stephen. Together we have teaching that is both practical and profound concerning Christian service.

[A] Humble service – vv. 1-7

In the growing infant Church, an issue arose (“complained” or “murmuring” γογγυσμος) between two groups of Jews – Hebraic (Aramaic speaking) and Hellenistic (Greek speaking). Though they were all Jews, differences were more than just linguistic. And in the matter of the care ministry of the Church, the Hellenistic widows were being overlooked in the daily assistance (v.1). What was the solution?

The apostles created a new team while wisely remaining focused on their spiritual leadership responsibility which was “*prayer and the ministry* (or “service” διακονια) *of the Word*” (v.4). This decision was affirmed by the apostolic team (v.5a) who blessed this new team to their work (v.5b).

The seven were selected to care for “*the daily distribution* (or “service” διακονια) *of food*” (v.2). These were to have a **good reputation** (“witnessed to” μαρτυρουμενους) and be **full of the Spirit and wisdom** (v.3). Stephen (“**full of faith**” v.4), Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas.

Both of these teams were called to **humble service** in the pattern set by Jesus (see John 13;12-17). What resulted? God’s Word spread (lit. grew) and many priests responded to the Gospel (v.7).

- **What teams do we have at Cornerstone?**

I promised to note the need for a Facilities Team from this passage. Put simply, our Leadership Team must focus on spiritual care and vision. Now that God has provided a building, the Facilities Team stewards it so our Leadership Team stays on task. **Nathan** has a Facilities Team update [Amish picture].

Children’s Ministry	Youth Ministry	Cleaning Team	Coffee Team
Communion & Décor	Facilities Team	Greeters, Ushers	Parking Lot
Home Group Leaders	Prayer	Leadership Team	Media, Worship, Sound
Men’s Ministry	Women’s Ministry	Finance/Offering	Nominating

- **How do these teams collaborate on mission?**

Each team is called to authentic service in their area. We have a monthly “huddle” with all leaders called **Shepherding Meting** to stimulate synergy. The next gathering is this Wednesday, 7 pm. Cole Peters will give his story of being called to ministry and get our help in a church research project. We must remember that whatever our role in the local church, we are to serve! It is essential for us to recognize that it is that humble service prepares us for all other challenges that will come our way.

[B] Heroic service – vv. 8-15

This second half of the passage highlights the heroic nature of Stephen's service. He faced great opposition and eventually became the first martyr of the Church. But as G. Campbell Morgan put it, "Stephen was a martyr before they stoned him." (*The Acts of the Apostles*, Revell, 1924, 177).

The message of the Resurrection of Christ evoked much opposition and hatred from the established religious leaders. In this passage they stooped to lies and false testimony in their attack of Stephen.

We will see the story of his actual martyrdom in chapter 7. Here in chapter 6 we have a description of Stephen living out the characteristics by which he was identified in verse 5. Stephen knew what it was to be accused unjustly. There are three things that are heroic about Stephen's testimony.

- **Heroic service evolves from humble service** – v. 8a
- **Heroic service is empowered by the Holy Spirit** – vv. 8b-10 and Zechariah 4:6
- **Heroic service embraces trials as spiritually productive** – vv. 11-15 and James 1:2-4

John Maxwell has written, "The pessimist complains about the wind. The optimist expects it to change. The leader adjusts the sails." This is the testimony of Stephen. He made the adjustments to the opposition which came his way. It was not his power but God's...it was not his own wisdom but God's.

Conclusion – Digging Deeper

The world needs to see something special in our responses to conflict and difficulty. Does the Holy Spirit shine through you in such times? How do we respond with godly character?

- **Welcome to Communion**

Everyone who knows and loves Jesus as Savior is welcome at this table. Amy Carmichael does a wonderful job in relating the ultimate suffering of Jesus for our salvation, to the reality of danger and difficulty as we follow and serve God.

*Have you no scar? No hidden scar on foot, or on hand?
I hear you sung as mighty in the land I hear them hail your bright ascending star:
Have you no scar? Have you no wound? Yet, I was wounded by the archers, spent,
Leaned I against the tree to die, and rent by ravening beasts that compassed me,
I swooned. Have you no wound? No wound? No scar?
Yet, as the master shall the servant be and pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But yours are whole. Can he have followed far who has no wound nor scar?*

- **Warning for Communion**

Just as we are warmly welcomed to the Lord's Table, we are also solemnly warned to celebrate with a pure heart. This Wednesday launched the season of Lent in the traditional church calendar which invites reflection and repentance in anticipation of celebrating Jesus death, burial, and resurrection.

*Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent.
Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our
broKENNESS, may receive from You, the God of all mercy, remission and forgiveness; through the blood of Jesus
Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

- **Bread & Cup**

As we are served, please listen to this **communion hymn**. Then we will all partake together.