

**Holy Spirit Acts:  
“Waiting Tables for God”**

**Acts 6:1-6**

A sermon preached by  
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Fort Smith, Arkansas  
June 13, 2021

## **Acts 6:1-6 Selection of seven to serve**

**6** About that time, while the number of disciples continued to increase, a complaint arose. Greek-speaking disciples accused the Aramaic-speaking disciples because their widows were being overlooked in the daily food service. **2** The Twelve called a meeting of all the disciples and said, “It isn’t right for us to set aside proclamation of God’s word in order to serve tables. **3** Brothers and sisters, carefully choose seven well-respected men from among you. They must be well-respected and endowed by the Spirit with exceptional wisdom. We will put them in charge of this concern. **4** As for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and the service of proclaiming the word.” **5** This proposal pleased the entire community. They selected Stephen, a man endowed by the Holy Spirit with exceptional faith, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. **6** The community presented these seven to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

### **Everyone has a place of service in the kingdom of God.**

Today we continue our journey through the book of Acts which is all about the powerful happenings in the early church. I hope you will read the whole book of Acts. If you do, you will find some amazing acts of the Holy Spirit!! You will find examples of supernatural signs and wonders. There are stories about shipwrecks and snake bites and prison breaks! Truly amazing stuff. And maybe even more amazing, you will also read about how the early believers formed a community that worked together to accomplish the mission that Jesus had given to the first disciples and to every follower of Jesus today.

The mission Jesus gives us is clear. Before he died, Jesus commanded the disciples to go and tell others about his life, death and resurrection. He told them to make new disciples, to teach them, and to baptize them.<sup>1</sup> And before he was crucified, Jesus got down on his knees and washed the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:16-20.

disciples' feet as a servant would do in order to teach them to serve each other.<sup>2</sup>

### **Everyone has a place of service in the kingdom of God.**

Over the last few weeks of this sermon series, we have read about the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. You may remember in Acts 2 that Peter stood up and proclaimed the good news of the salvation that comes from knowing Jesus, and 3,000 were baptized, then in Acts 4, 5,000 more came to believe.

The community of believers developed a way of loving and supporting one another -- they prayed, studied and worshiped together; they ate together and made sure that no one was in need. The love that they had for one another was so extraordinary that more and more people were being saved. And in last week's scripture from Acts 4 the "apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and **an abundance of grace was at work among them all.**" (Acts 4:33). Not only were the early believers saying the name of Jesus, but their actions reflected the attitude of Christ -- serving without regard for personal comfort; serving without regard for personal gain.

### **Everyone has a place of service in God's kingdom.**

Today's scripture from Acts 6 reflects this ongoing theme of service. You see more and more people were coming into the community of believers. The community described in this text is really diverse --- there are Greek-speaking people and Aramic speaking people. Those names I struggled to read in the text are mostly Greek names. There would have been people from many different places. And perhaps similar to our nation and our church today, it seems that the First Century church was somewhat divided. In this case, it seems the division fell along "linguistic and cultural lines." There seems

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<sup>2</sup> John 13.

to be some worry that one group's widows were not being properly supported. Verse 1 says:  
About that time, while the number of disciples continued to increase, a complaint arose. Greek-speaking disciples accused the Aramaic-speaking disciples because their widows were being overlooked in the daily food service. Acts 6:1

So, let's talk for a minute about what's going on here. First it helps to know what First Century widows faced -- and actually some widows in developing countries face these issues even today! One commentator wrote that "widows and orphans were vulnerable financially because most widows inherited no property and had few ways to make money to support themselves. There were many widows, because young girls often married older men. Also, men often took greater physical risks--in military service or protecting livestock against wild animals."<sup>3</sup>

The other thing that is going on in this scripture is that from the beginning of our faith, part of our core identity has included protecting those who are vulnerable. In the Old Testament, there are special provisions for the care of widows and orphans in the Torah Law. "Landowners were required to leave the edges of their field unharvested so that the needy could glean the fields to have enough food to survive. The Law also made provision for the next of kin to redeem land sold by a relative and required families to support indigent relatives."<sup>4</sup> And the prophets emphasized caring for the poor and condemned mistreatment of widows and orphans.

Jesus continually demonstrated by his actions and in his words a special concern for the vulnerable. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus announced his mission to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Donovan, [www.sermonwriter.com](http://www.sermonwriter.com).

<sup>4</sup> Richard Donovan, [www.sermonwriter.com](http://www.sermonwriter.com) . Lev. 25:25, 35, Isaiah 1:17, 23; 10:1, Jeremiah 5:28, 7:6, 22:3; Malachi 3:5.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 4:18.

In Acts 6, we see that it was core to the community's identity that they would care for and protect those who were vulnerable -- that those who needed extra care would be provided for. It is core to **our** identity today as disciples of Jesus Christ that we should care for those in need. And that is why **everyone has a place of service in God's kingdom.**

The problem presented in today's scripture was solved by dividing and conquering. Some of the believers were appointed to preach and pray, while some were appointed to wait tables so to speak -- that is, some took on the role of caring for the widows.

Now, you know as well as I do, that there are so many needs in the world. There are so many people who need to know the love of God, that we must all say "yes" to the work at hand! When every single believer is serving..... the full, world-changing power of Jesus is brought to bear in our lives, in our communities, and across the world. If every believer served, we would not only proclaim the good news of the salvation of Christ, but the hungry would be fed, the naked would be clothed, the prisoner and sick would be visited, the lonely and grieving would be comforted, and Christ's love would reign.

My friends, no job is **too great** for us to accomplish when we are inspired and empowered to act by the Holy Spirit.

And no job is **too small** for us to attend to when we are inspired and empowered to act by the Holy Spirit.

Some of the acts of the Holy Spirit result in big and noticeable transformation. Some of the work we are given makes our heart sing -- it feels as if we were created for such a time as this!

A few years ago, I got to travel to an orphanage in Monjas, Guatemala, called Shadow of His Wings. It wasn't strictly an orphanage for children without parents, some of the children had been removed from abusive homes or had been abandoned to the dangerous streets of Guatemala City. At Shadow of His Wings individual homes were built on a beautiful piece of land that sits on a hill overlooking the rural town of Monjas. Each family unit houses up to 12 children.

And each home had house parents who had given their lives to raise these children as their own, moving to the orphanage, and sometimes bringing their own biological children. The parents made sure all the children received love, care, and an education. Shadow of His Wings is a work of the Holy Spirit that has big, tangible results! Children find a place of love and healing there; they learn about Jesus, and many of the children have gone on to college and are raising families of their own. Lives and communities are being transformed because the house parents said “yes” to serving God in this big way.

Carolyn Moor was widowed as a young woman on Valentine’s Day 2000 with two young daughters to raise by herself. Carolyn struggled to find the mentors she needed to model the healing and growth she desperately sought. This ultimately led to the founding of Modern Widows Club in Carolyn’s very own living room in 2011.<sup>6</sup> Modern Widows Club is unique -- it is described as “a mentor-focused program” where widows support one another. The idea is to help widows “develop the tools they need to strengthen themselves” with the focus of the club being on the health of widows rather than the grieving process. The group provides resources to help widows gain hope, begin healing, learn to grow, and even advocate for widows in the community and worldwide.

Carolyn’s grief has turned into a worldwide effort of support, care and healing for widows. And I am so happy to say that there is now a Modern Widows Club forming in Fort Smith -- it will be the second community in Arkansas. The Holy Spirit continues to provide surprising ways that God’s people can do God’s work and make a big impact on individual lives and the community. And I hope that you will tell all the widows you know about this new group that is meeting monthly.

But, sometimes the work the Holy Spirit accomplishes through us results in little or no noticeable progress whatsoever. Some of the work is just the nitty gritty kind of thing that is surely not glamorous and is often difficult and mundane. It sometimes gets discouraging because it feels like

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<sup>6</sup> <https://modernwidowsclub.org/about/>

this type of service isn't worthwhile. But, I have come to believe that most often it is through these nitty gritty, simple acts of service that we are **really** living out the calling to serve one another. It is when the serving is routine or even tough that we must trust in God and walk by faith that God is at work even when we can't see it. So, today I want to say your hard work and your simple acts of love matter too. **I have so many examples from this community of believers showing that everyone has a place to serve in God's kingdom.**

For instance, I can't even imagine how many cards you all have written expressing God's love for one another -- or how many prayers you have prayed, or how many phone calls and text messages you have sent to those in need!

Families bake cookies to take to our EMS teams, firefighters and police officers. And kids color the bags for the cookie delivery

Our children are collecting socks for the homeless this summer, and they need your help.

Casseroles are being prepared and sack lunches packed regularly for families in need, the Last Sunday Breakfast has continued during the pandemic by taking breakfast to the streets, and the Red Shield Diner crew never stopped feeding hungry people.

A small group of ladies decided they wanted to serve the homeless community. So once a month they go to the Hope Campus and cook and serve a meal.

Knitters are knitting prayer shawls for those suffering and knotters are making mats out of plastic bags for children and the homeless.

Kind servants are helping with children and youth and Ashley and Michael are seeking new servants to help right now.

You all are gathering in small groups just like the early believers did, and there are people out there who are organizing, leading and teaching. That is an act of service!

The Leadership teams of your church meet regularly to keep the facilities in tip top shape, to steward your tithes, to support and evaluate the pastors and to dream about how this

church will make disciples of Jesus Christ. These are nitty gritty jobs. But they are vital.

The wonderful musicians who bring us into God's presence through their beautiful offerings are serving God's kingdom. And we couldn't fully experience worship without the audio and video technicians who serve faithfully behind the scenes.

Your guest services team has worked tirelessly during the pandemic to keep you all safe and at the same time show amazing hospitality. They have been so flexible as our covid protocol has changed over the last year. This team always steps up when they are asked to serve for a worship service or a funeral.

I could go on and on!!

But I won't!

Because the Holy Spirit is going to inspire each of you to know the exact way you might be needed for God's kingdom.

My friends, no job is too great and no job is too small when we are inspired and empowered to act by the Holy Spirit.

### **Everyone has a place of service in God's kingdom.**

So, what about you?

This call to service comes at the very beginning of our faith journeys. In our baptismal vows, one thing that we promise is that we will be Christ's representatives in the world. Take this in --- in our baptisms we are called to take the place of Christ in the world. Fellow-disciples, that is a huge responsibility. And Christ is counting on us!

I don't often quote the United Methodist Book of Discipline, but when I do, it is almost always paragraph 130 which describes faithful ministry. And it says this:

¶ **130. Faithful Ministry**—The people of God, who are the church made visible in the world, must convince the world of the reality of the gospel or leave it unconvinced. There can be no evasion or delegation of this responsibility; the church is



either faithful as a witnessing and serving community, or it loses its vitality and its impact on an unbelieving world.<sup>7</sup>

God is calling you this day to faithful ministry.

Everyone has a place of service in God's kingdom:  
Stephen and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus from Antioch.

**Everyone has a place of service in God's kingdom:**

you and you and you and you --  
you who are watching on facebook and youtube,  
you listening on the radio; you in the balcony; you  
reading this later or listening to a podcast!

May the Father, Son and Holy Spirit raise each of you  
up,  
give each of you the power of the almighty,  
and send each of you out to serve in God's kingdom.  
Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Paragraph 130, *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, 2016.