



Acts:

A Life of Witness

Week Five: Acts 6: 1-7 *The Witness of ENGAGING CONFLICT*

Opening Question: What is your go-to strategy when you are in a disagreement with someone? Do you try to solve it? Need time to process? Close your eyes and just HOPE it will go away on its own? Turn to trusted friends for advice? Pray?

CONTEXT

A quick look back: The past two weeks we have learned that we can witness through shalom and proclamation. What has stuck with you from those weeks? We are still very early in the story of the new church- how would you describe the mood and atmosphere of these early followers?

Today's Passage: Last week, we encountered pressure and conflict from those outside the community of Jesus-followers. Today, we will see conflict rising within this new family of believers. The conflict centers around widows from two ethnic groups- the Hebrew widows and the Hellenist/Greek widows. The care of widows was deeply ingrained in Jewish practice, and this story tells us that it seems to remain important in the early church as well. The story takes place in Jerusalem, which had the largest ethnic mix of Jews from around the world. The Hebrew widows are the established "locals" and speak Arabic. The Greek widows come from other areas and speak Greek as their mother tongue. Therefore, the conflict comes down to "insider/outsider" language, and the sense that the new family of Christians is neglecting some of its members. Today, we watch how the early church handles this conflict, and we learn why careful, wise, and Spirit-filled engagement with conflict can be a powerful communal witness to the person and work of Christ.

CONTENT

Read Acts 6: 1-7 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, or C) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text? What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group to share and discuss your observations, writing them in a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Creative Engagement: Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, lists, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together to share and discuss what you drew and why.

Option C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. The care of widows is deeply ingrained in the Jewish faith. Ask several people in your group to find and read one of the following passages (Deut 10:17-19; Deut 27:19; Is 1:16-17; Jer 7:3-7; Matt 25:) and then discuss as a group what you learn about God's posture and attitude towards widows (as well as orphans and foreigners).
2. The phrase "to wait on tables" (vs 2) can seem demeaning out of context. But what do we see in these verses that indicate how important this work of service was? What are the qualifications in vs 3? How is Stephen described in vs 5? How are those chosen commissioned in vs 6?
3. The complaint of neglect comes from the Grecian Jews. The seven people chosen to serve are of Greek descent (we know this from their names). This means they come from inside the offended group. Talk about how this changes or expands your understanding of this story.
4. The Hebrew apostles could have reacted many ways to this conflict- do nothing, defend themselves, argue, cast blame. What do they do instead? Why does this matter? What kind of "power" are they demonstrating? What patterns are they setting in their mission to "be witnesses..."(Acts 1:8).
5. Look at vs 7. What happens as a result of this faithful engagement with conflict?

APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- Have you ever been part of a faith community or other community where you felt (like the Grecian widows) that you didn't belong, or were treated as an "outsider"? Talk about your experience and what it felt like.
- When faced with the problem in front of them, the apostles knew their own limitedness. They simply couldn't keep doing the work they were doing AND take on this ever-growing task of attentively caring for the vulnerable members of their fellowship. What are the messages in your life (school, church, culture, family, friends) about this idea of being limited. Is it embraced? Mocked? Dismissed? Challenged? What might our limitedness offer us? Why might it be important in a life of faith?
- We have said in this study that God will use our everyday lives to bear witness to His story of redemption and love. How do you see engaging conflict as a way to witness? Have you ever seen a faith community do this well? Do this poorly? How might conflict and its resolution be viewed differently in the church than it is in the wider culture?

PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your "wonderings" from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer by Saint Francis of Assisi:

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.*

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Amen.