The body of Christ cannot be all it can be without you.

Body Building

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. David Jordan-Haas
Acts 6:1-7

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We thank you, good and faithful God – that You are here, right now and always, to comfort, strengthen, inspire. Thank you for walking with us, for breathing life into us. May these next moments (in Your Word) now be for You a tangible sign of our desire to more fully know You, love You, follow You. In and through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Teacher. Amen.

We’re 5 weeks into our ALL-IN ACTS Sermon Series. You’ve heard us say this, that as much as it’s called the “Acts of the Apostles,” it’s really also Luke’s recording of the “Actions of the Holy Spirit.” Starting with Jesus’ Ascension, then into the Day at Pentecost, Luke shows us the amazing movement of the Holy Spirit. Luke shows us the power of the Holy Spirit in those beginning years, and the “growing pains,” AND in those Early Church years when the numbers of new believers were exploding.

The Holy Spirit, Who moved in those early years IS STILL on the move today? Do you believe this? The Holy Spirit is as powerful and potent as the Holy Spirit was 2,100 years ago. If I were to give you a One-Liner for today’s sermon, it’s this: Right now, the Body of Christ cannot be all it can be without you. The Holy Spirit is counting on us!

This morning we’re at the beginning verses of Acts 6. Regretfully, I don’t have time to detail what we’ve missed in chapters 4 and 5. Let’s just say that the Roman and religious opposition against the Early Church is increasingly ferocious. They simply can’t stand a revolution going on, a revolution, as Pete described Him last week, a revolution founded upon a dead Jew Who is Risen from the dead!

What we do see in Acts 6, for the VERY FIRST time, is that there are some tensions within the church, some “GROWING PAINS” in the Body – a Body that is now surging to close to 10,000 believers. In just a few years the Body of Jesus is exploding, spreading … without Snap Chat, lawn placards, Tweets, or Instagram! Can you believe it?! Some of you
know that I’m an occasional late-night movie goer. So, like some of you, I became a subscriber to the App called “Movie Pass,” last year in the fall of 2017. I loved the ease of the monthly fee, grabbing a ticket, and going whenever I wanted to, to whatever late-night showing I wanted to! That was last year when there were only about 20,000 subscribers. But in just 6 months, by March of this year, Movie Pass rocketed to 2 million subscribers. And by early May I was done; I deleted the App; I ended my subscription. Their explosive growth caused many headaches for their customers. Technical mishaps, nonresponsive customer service, movie theaters suddenly blocked out. I was done. At the time Movie Pass couldn’t handle their growing pains and it cost them some of the folks who first believed in them! (Brian Barrett, Wired, 3/7/18)

Let’s look now at this little “Start-Up” called the Early Church AND their own “growing pains.” Acts 6:1-7, explaining a few verses at a time, as I go:

6 But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. Maybe it was merely the language barrier – Jewish-believers, who were Aramaic-speaking, not being able to understand new Greek-speaking believers, and vice-versa. Maybe it was jealously over preferential treatment given to the Jewish-Christian widows, over the Greek-Christians. Whatever the reasons the new “subscribers” to the Early Church were looking for some Human Resource solutions, some customer service interventions. Because they weren’t interested in losing any of its growing base of believers the Early Church responded!

2 So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. 3 And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. 4 Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word.”

With the support of the whole community the Apostles intervened! NO one was going to be withheld care. No one within the Body – the least or the lowly or the lonely – no one was going to be forgotten or ignored.
Notice that a new set of Spiritual Gifts was needed for the ever-expanding Body of believers. The Apostles, they had the gifts of teaching and shepherding, of evangelism and preaching. Here, the Apostles were calling on others who had gifts of administration and mercy, of hospitality and helping. There’s no indication of there being a prescribed “hierarchy of gifts.” Right? As Paul explains aptly in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12, the Body needs every part of itself serving!

Our last 3 verses:

5 Everyone liked this idea, and the Apostles chose the following: (NOTE: these are the very first “Deacons,” and it’s a great customer service move – the Apostles select 7 “Greek” Christians in order to diffuse any remaining grumbling from the Greek-speaking widows.) Stephen and Philip (the only 2 of the 7 who are later mentioned in the New Testament), Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch. 6 These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them. The Holy Spirit brought great results: A much-needed Mercy Ministry was established AND more believers were being sent out to use their gifts in Building Up the Body! VERSE 7 …… 7 So God’s message continued to spread. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem …… 10 TIMES this verse is repeated; 10 times throughout all of Acts – The Holy Spirit is ALWAYS on the move!

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost half of small businesses don’t ever get to celebrate their fifth anniversary; and less than a third of small businesses ever make it to the ten-year mark. IT issues can’t keep up with growing demands; executive leadership weakens; staff morale wanes; quality service loses its quality. How is it that this upstart, early church, of not even 10,000 believers, continued to soar and shine and succeed, now into its 21st century of doing business?!

The Holy Spirit LIVES in you. (Romans 8:11) The Holy Spirit is counting on you. Do you believe that the Holy Spirit Who moved 2,100 years ago, can still be on the move today? The Body of Christ cannot be all it can be without you.

So, this morning I want you to do one thing – just one application. Here it is: I’m asking you to be a Body Builder. FILL out your S.H.A.P.E. IDENTIFY the unique Spiritual Gifts in you. LEARN what your S.H.A.P.E. is. Knowing your SHAPE and using your gifts is how the Body of Christ will grow and spread. The Body of Christ needs you to make the Body more than it is today! I’m asking you to be Body-
**Builders.** I’m asking you to exercise and live out your SHAPE more fully, more intentionally – Christ’s Body is counting on you and me.

STAY WITH THIS SLIDE. This is our VPC Website Link to access the SHAPE Assessment online! Your SHAPE results get emailed back to you! S.H.A.P.E. is an acronym, first developed by Pastor Rick Warren in his book, The Purpose Driven Life. Here’s S.H.A.P.E. EVEN if you’ve done your SHAPE already, stay with me!

“S” stands for your set of Spiritual Gifts, which the Spirit has given you, to use.
“H” stands for your Heart – your passions, the things that excite you, which give you joy when you are pursuing your heart’s passions.
“A” stands for your cluster of Abilities, your skills, which make you a highly effective human being when it comes to serving and helping others.
“P” stands for your Personality, which indicates your relational strengths, and the ways God has wired you to connect with others.
And, the “E” stands for your life’s Experiences – YOUR stories of redemption, of overcoming adversity, pain, of transformation. God wants you to use your experiences to be a living witness to God’s grace and mercy for others and for the world.

SHAPE = Spiritual Gifts; your Heart’s Passions; your Abilities; Personality; your life Experiences.

**SLIDE** – The next slide is to tell you that you can also find out about SHAPE in the ALL-IN ACTS Group Curriculum on pages 25-26. Check it out!

What I find is that when I am living and serving within my SHAPE, THEN I truly have a visceral sense of JOY inside me. Similarly, when I am dragging myself to a volunteer opportunity, or when I am frustrated while I’m serving others, THEN chances are I’m not working within my SHAPE! There’s a joy and a freedom in living your SHAPE, in building up the BODY!

For those of you who have already done your SHAPE and who already know your spiritual gifts, here’s your challenge. Where do you see the Holy Spirit moving you further into acts of leadership and service? Is there another level of joy in serving God and others that God is calling you to?
In the body-building world, as I understand it, there are 3 main types of body-building that correspond with 3 different goals. For the goal of “muscle endurance” a body-builder lifts less weight, but lifts for a longer period of time. For the goal of “muscle growth” a body-builder lifts medium weight, but lifts for a shorter period of time, of multiple reps. Finally, for greater “muscle density” a body-builder lifts heavier weight in more frequent, intense bursts. In other words, lifting less weight but for longer time, produces muscle endurance; lifting medium weight for a shorter time, produces larger muscle mass; AND, lifting heavier weight in rapid bursts, produces denser muscle. (Upper Room Daily, Jeff Grogan, 10/3/18) All good for the Body Builders!

While physical training is of some value, spiritual training is valuable in every way.

1 Timothy 4:8

The Apostle Paul tells his “spiritual son” Timothy, that “While physical training is of some value, spiritual training is valuable in every way.”(1 Timothy 4:8) Disciplined, steady physical training helps to make your body strong. But spiritually, your discipline in making your S.H.A.P.E. stronger, makes Christ’s Body even stronger! Exercise your Spiritual Gifts and use them daily; increase your Heart’s passions for God; sharpen your Abilities and Skills; strengthen your Personality in relationships, and witness to God’s faithfulness and goodness through your Experiences. Strengthen your SHAPE and you will help strengthen Christ’s Body!

The Holy Spirit is as powerful and potent as the Holy Spirit was 2,100 years ago. The Holy Spirit is counting on you and me. Today, right now, the Body of Christ cannot be all it can be without you. Be a Body-Builder!

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Closing Prayer:
“Risen Jesus, Thank You, Praise You for the power and movement of Your Spirit then, and NOW. By Your Spirit’s power, living in us, help us to share and spread Your saving words of love and mercy. HELP us Build Up Your Body – that through us people would see You and Your Beauty; that people would see and experience Your Loving-Kindness, Your Abundant Life! …. even now, right now, as
we COME to the Table of Love which You prepare for us. I thank You, Jesus. We thank You Jesus. I love You. We love You, Jesus. AMEN.”