

Acts 6: 1

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose...

Isn't it wonderful that Christians always get along so well and never complain?

I was thinking this week, that it has been my experience that when just a few Christians get together they will begin to complain about something or another. It is just me?

My personal favorite topic to complain about is music. I miss the old hymns. I really do. Let me read you a story that explains my case.

An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended a large church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the farmer, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns."

"Praise choruses?" said his wife. "What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like hymns, only different," said the farmer.

"What's the difference?" asked his wife.

The farmer said, "Well, it's like this - if I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a hymn. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you:

'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh, Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA,
the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows,
the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS,
COWS

are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn,
the CORN, CORN, CORN.'

"Then, if I were to repeat the whole thing two or three times, well, that would be a praise chorus."

Coincidentally, the same week a young businessman from the city who normally attended a church with contemporary-style worship was in the old farmer's town on business and visited the farmer's small church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was. "Well," said the young man, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang hymns instead of regular songs."

"Hymns?" said his wife. "What are those?"

"Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like regular songs, only different," said the young man.

"What's the difference?" asked his wife.

The young man said, "Well, it's like this - if I were to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a regular song. If, on the other hand, I were to say to you:

'Oh Martha, dear Martha, hear thou my cry,
Inclinst thine ear to the words of my mouth.
Turn thou thy whole wondrous ear by and by
To the righteous, inimitable, glorious truth.

'For the way of the animals, who can explain?
There in their heads is no shadow of sense,
Hearkenest they in God's sun or his rain
Unless from the mild, tempting corn they are fenced.

'Yea, those cows in glad bovine, rebellious delight,
Have broke free their shackles, their warm pens eschewed.
Then, goaded by minions of darkness and night,
They all my mild Chilliwack sweet corn have chewed.

'So look to that bright shining day by and by,
Where all foul corruptions of earth are reborn.
Where no vicious animal makes my soul cry,
And I no longer see those foul cows in the corn.'

"Then, if I were to do only verses one, three and four, and do a key change on the last verse, well, that would be a hymn."

We laugh when we hear this, but Christian can complain about almost anything. Our study this morning demonstrates that we are not alone. It appears to have been happening for a long time.

Look at verse 1 of Acts 6.

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

Can you picture the scene here? In the past chapters of Acts, we have studied a vibrant community of believers empowered by the Holy Spirit begin to be persecuted by the religious community. We have seen hypocrisy exposed. We have seen God strengthen His people through all of these attacks. We have seen thousands and thousands of people come to know Christ.

So far this new creation called the Church has overcome Satan. But now, Luke tells us in verse one that a complaint has caused a division from within. Notice that he points out that one group begins to complain about the actions of another group.

Now before we get into this specific complaint in Acts 6, let's have some fun and list all of the complaints that we have.

Now let's take all of that negative energy and see how the early church dealt with their complaints. Look again at verse 1.

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food.

What is the complaint about in verse 1?

A division between the Hellenistic Jews and the native Jews had occurred over the feeding of widows who were not the local widows but were from outside the area.

You see the Hellenistic Jews were converts to Christ who were raised in a Greek culture outside of Palestine. They had moved to Jerusalem and were worshipping in the Jerusalem church. The

native Jews from Jerusalem thought of the Hellenistic Jews as foreigners.

It is like southerners calling those of us from the north Yankees and sometimes using a not so nice adjective to describe us. Especially those of us from New York.

Remember that the church had grown at breakneck speed. And you might expect that with this many people and with the speed in which the church was developing, that there would be some growing pains.

Now, when there are disagreements in a church over non-doctrinal issues, usually they are handled in one of two ways: either with an aggressive style or with a passive style.

When someone or a group of individuals are offended over one thing or another in the church and they choose to deal with it passively, describe to me their behavior.

<So they withdraw from healthy relationships. They may show no outward hostility, but they become unwilling to invest in the body. They usually stop coming to functions and when they do, they don't mix with others.>

What usually happens to these people if the situation is not dealt with?

<They will leave the church>

The aggressive style is quite different. Describe what happens in a church when someone or a group have a complaint and become aggressive.

<They actively attempt to divide the organization into sides.>

What usually happens to these people if the situation is not dealt with?

<Bitterness and/or suspicion can cause the church to split>

Now let me ask you a question. Is all dissention bad or unhealthy?

Of course not! Issue oriented differences of opinion are healthy. How different people approach different ministries are healthy.

If we were all the same, church would be boring. But God is a God of unity and order. Therefore, there is a need for leadership in the church to ensure that there is a clear direction and purpose for the members of the church to follow.

Let's talk for a few minutes to talk about church leadership. What are the most important things to you in a church leader?

I know that this has never happened at Immanuel, but I have heard that in some churches rivalries have occurred between some of the ministries.

What can the leader do when rivalries occur between ministries?

Jesus said in Matt 12:25,

25 ...Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand.

Let's talk about the structure of the early church. The book of Acts talks about 3 groups.

1. First there were the Apostles. Who were these guys? These were the twelve referred to in Acts 1:26. They were the oversees of the early church appointed by God. There were very specific rules applied to who these men were.
2. The second group were the Disciples. Who were these people? These were all the believers in Christ who comprised the local assembly in Jerusalem. Regardless of culture, language or origin, if they followed the Lord Jesus, they were referred to in Acts as Disciples.
3. Now in Acts 6 we find this new group. A group of seven. They have no official title but their purpose was to stop divisions that grew out of complaints.

So let's look at the problem. Look again at verse 1:

1 Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. 2 So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task.

So they had a problem. What were the qualifications that the apostles gave to the disciples in choosing the seven men to address the complaint?

1. Men with Good Reputations
2. Men full of the Holy Spirit
3. Men full of Wisdom

Who was to do the choosing?

It is interesting that those who were doing the complaining were told to solve do the selection with very simple directions.

Notice what the apostles say to the people in verse 4 and the reaction of the congregation in verse 5.

4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. 5 The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch.

Notice these names were mostly Hellenistic Jews. In fact, the name Nicolas is not even an ethnic Jewish name!

We know from historical accounts and biblical accounts that Philip later was known as Philip the Evangelist because he reached an entire city in Samaria for Christ and opened Ethiopia as a mission

field. We will study Stephen next week, but he became a strong preacher and one of the first martyrs of the church.

Notice the result in verse 6.

6 And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.

What do we learn from this study? All churches that have members will have complainers. Why? Because as humans it is our nature to complain. But Unity is a key factor for the church to be healthy.

Secondly, Satan seeks to destroy the church through disunity and complaining. So the next time someone starts to complain about something, find a way to resolve the issue in a way that would be pleasing to our Lord. Remember, it is ok to dissent, but it is not ok to divide.