# SERMON SERIES:

# CARRYING ON THE MISSION OF JESUS

# “We Can Get Somebody To Do That”

## *Acts 6:1-7*

This morning we continue our sermon series titled “Carrying On The Mission Of Jesus.” We’re studying the book of Acts in order to rediscover the mission, heritage, and purpose of the early church, and to see how that impacts our church today. Up to this point we’ve talked about several important factors a vibrant church must have. The first is an external focus on the world and those in need of Jesus Christ. This is mandated in Acts 1:8: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* This is the “ever-widening circle,” the growing, expanding presence of God’s kingdom in the world.

Second, a church must possess the same two imperatives the early church demonstrated: devotion to Jesus and obedience to Jesus. Third, we saw last week how the church must welcome the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; must have a deep dedication to prayer; and must be willing to endure persecution as it walks the road to mission with Jesus.

Today’s Scripture reading is Acts 6:1-7 so let’s turn there. ***As you do, let me share a short parable with you:*** ***Once there was a church with four members: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. The pastor issued a call for volunteers to help in the nursery, to paint the fellowship hall, and to follow up with first-time visitors. Everybody was asked to help out.***

***Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it.***

***Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it.***

***Somebody got angry because it was Everybody’s job.***

***Everybody thought Anybody would do it, but Nobody realized that Anybody wouldn’t do it.***

***It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.***

Does that sound familiar? We might chuckle at the absurdity of this little illustration, but it hits home. Many of us have sat in committee meetings and longed for more able-bodied, open-hearted, generous-spirited people to step forward and be involved. And yet the vast majority of churches struggle to fulfill their mission because few do too much and many do too little.

*1-4During this time, as the disciples were increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds, hard feelings developed among the Greek-speaking believers—“Hellenists”—toward the Hebrew-speaking believers because their widows were being discriminated against in the daily food lines. So the Twelve called a meeting of the disciples. They said, “It wouldn’t be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor. So, friends, choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we’ll assign them this task. Meanwhile, we’ll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God’s Word.”*

*5-6The congregation thought this was a great idea. They went ahead and chose—*

*Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicolas, a convert from Antioch. Then they presented them to the apostles. Praying, the apostles laid on hands and commissioned them for their task. 7The Word of God prospered. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased dramatically. Not least, a great many priests submitted themselves to the faith*

Luke, the author of Acts, begins by saying, *During this time, as the disciples were increasing in numbers by leaps and bounds…* Lives were being transformed in the early church! The good news of the kingdom of God was spreading. The young church had experienced phenomenal growth because of prayer and the work of the Holy Spirit.

When churches grow, several things happen. One is that there are more new faces and it becomes harder to know everyone. This can often be an unspoken reason why some people don’t really want their church to grow. They want it to remain the way it’s always been, with the people they’ve always known.

A second thing that happens is that more needs arise and people can begin to fall through the cracks if the church isn’t careful. Look back in chapter 6: we’re told …*hard feelings developed among the Greek-speaking believers—“Hellenists”—toward the Hebrew-speaking believers because their widows were being discriminated against in the daily food lines.* The more growth that occurs, the more needs there are. And somewhere along the line―always unintentionally―someone can get left behind. In the early church of Acts 6, it was the Greek-speaking believers—those who’d formerly been Gentiles. They felt as if the widows among their ethnic group were being discriminated against at the food bank.

And a third thing that happens when God blesses the church with growth is that more servants are needed. And here’s our focus today. Pick up in Acts 6:2: *So the Twelve called a meeting of the disciples. They said, “It wouldn't be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor.”* The Twelve recognized there was a serious problem. Such division and prejudice can ruin a church very quickly.

But pay attention to how the Twelve respond. They understood that everyone was to be involved in God’s work, not just a select few. The Twelve wisely recognized what their specific responsibilities were: …*preaching and teaching the Word of God [and] prayer…* This is important for us to grasp; we cannot overemphasize it enough!

Everybody in the church has gifts, abilities, talents, and skills that’re to be used to reach the lost, make disciples, and expand the kingdom of God. Some gifts are up front and obvious; others are quiet and in the background. Each of us is gifted in some ways and not in others. The Twelve fully understood that they had a crucial obligation to invest their time in preaching, teaching, and praying. They were the leaders, and as such, their leadership had to be concentrated in those areas. That was where God had gifted them to serve the church.

They said, *“It wouldn't be right for us to abandon our responsibilities…to help with the care of the poor.”* ***Whatever you do, don’t misunderstand this statement!*** They weren’t saying that the poor were beneath them, or that hands-on, down-in-the-dirt ministry wasn’t for them. ***I’d be willing to bet my next breath that those Twelve helped out however they could, whenever they could.*** But they knew their primary focus needed to be on leading through God’s Word. If they failed at that, they failed at everything else.

Their response to the problem was to rally gifted people to take care of the need. Who among them was good at connecting with older people? Who had a heart for serving others? Who could oversee and lead this new ministry? The Twelve didn’t say “We’ll get Somebody to do that” and then drop it. They followed through and activated people to be in the food distribution ministry. “…*choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we'll assign them this task. Meanwhile, we'll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God's Word.”* Whenever we expect one person—or a handful of people—to do everything in the church, we’re not being biblical. The church is designed to be a place of active participation and ministry.

The early church succeeded in its mission by having everyone involved. As we’ve seen so far in this series, there were no paid professionals in the early church. People served in whatever ways they were gifted to serve. It’s the responsibility of the church—*the people*―to do the work of the church.

And this is where so many churches have bogged down. The majority are not involved in meaningful, hands-on ministry. It’s assumed—or worse yet, expected—that the pastor and a few other people will do everything it takes to move the church along. If you look at churches that’re growing and thriving, you’ll find the majority of their members are actively involved, inside and outside the church. It isn’t left up to the pastor, Lay Leader, board of elders, or a few other dedicated folks to get everything done. When this is the predominant attitude in a church, you’ll consistently find weary pastors, overworked and burnt-out members, and little—if any—success in fulfilling the mission of Jesus Christ.

These few verses in Acts 6 show us that different people do different things in order to make the body of Christ strong and effective. The idea that a pastor is supposed to do everything in the church is unrealistic, unbiblical, and impossible! Acts 6 completely refutes this concept, as does a passage in Ephesians 4. Yet churches that persist in using that model discover a couple of things.

The first is that it increases the workload of the pastor, and draws the pastor away from his or her primary responsibilities of preaching, teaching, praying, and leading. Second, whenever the pastor is expected to do everything, the members of the church are robbed of their God-given opportunities to contribute as active participants of the body of Christ. Third, pastors are put in the position of operating out of their weaknesses more than their strengths. ***You’ve seen this before. Perhaps you’ve had a pastor who was very gifted in the pulpit or in Bible study, but wasn’t very good at the administrative aspects? Or maybe you’ve had a pastor who was strong in visitation but weak in leading worship?*** ***What normally happens is the pastor is criticized for his or her weaknesses, when in fact those weaknesses are the very places that God has gifted people of the church to fill.***

***This was illustrated in my last appointment. There was a retired elderly pastor in the congregation named John Olive. John came and asked me if he could take Communion to the shut-ins. I wholeheartedly agreed for the reasons I just mentioned. It freed me to work in the areas of my giftedness, the shut-ins received ministry and the sacrament, and John was able to serve through his giftedness.***

Look very quickly back in Acts 6:7. Pay attention to what happens when every part of the body of Christ fulfills its God-given purpose: *The Word of God prospered. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased dramatically. Not least, a great many priests submitted themselves to the faith.* Do you think all that could’ve happened if the Twelve had been expected to do everything? Of course not! So why do we think we can leave all ministry in the hands of a few and expect the church to grow? It simply won’t work. The extent to which the people of God fulfill their responsibilities of ministry is the extent to which the church will prosper and grow.

Let us pray: *Father, we offer thanks and praise for Soddy United Methodist Church. This, our spiritual home, is very special to all of us. Deep within our hearts we wish that more people would come here and experience the joy and fellowship that makes this such a wonderful church. We don’t have a lot of ministries like other churches. We don’t have “bells and whistles” to catch peoples’ attention. What we DO have is a dedicated, loving group of men and women who give of themselves to serve this church and community. We’re grateful for them―whether they exercise their giftedness through enhancing our worship with music, working at the Food Bank, shepherding our children and youth, chairing committees, volunteering to serve on those committees, or providing financial and prayer support for all our endeavors. Thank you for the giftedness and blessings that keep our church going. We continue to ask that you draw new people to us and to what you have to offer here in this place. In the name of Jesus Christ; amen.*