

St. Paul: On The Same page

05.11.14 for Easter 5a

Day One: Acts 6:1-9

So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables." ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

How do you pick a good leader? Obviously, we look for the right education – strong interpersonal skills – a track record of success – a great resume'. We might put them through a battery of tests, be sure to get a criminal background check, and call all their references. That's how the world does it. And that's why most of us wouldn't make the cut.

Who is qualified to serve in the church? Who should the disciples choose to be the first deacons, the servants who would help to manage the caring work of the church?

They didn't look for a background in accounting. They didn't do interviews. They didn't even list relevant skills. The church looked for men "of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom."

Why do you suppose education and task skills are not emphasized? Perhaps because they knew the real work of leading the church is not done by men or women. We only serve, but the real work must be done by God. So what we really need are people who are walking in faith, people who are trusting in God.

How prepared are you to be a leader? Many Christians will not volunteer to lead, perhaps because they think they must have a set of skills, the way the world thinks. But our church needs faithful people – people who pray – people who wisely see more than worldly things.

How does God wish to work through you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I have nothing to offer. But I pray, work through me. Show your power. Give me a willing spirit to be your instrument. Amen.*

Day Two: Acts 7:57-60

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

"Why do we have to study history?" I've heard that question many times. Schoolchildren often don't see a purpose in learning about things that happened a long time ago.

Stephen's listeners could have said the same. They were proud of their history, but they did not welcome Stephen's long lecture on it because he insisted on pointing out all the bad parts. He reminded them of how unfaithful their famous ancestors had been.

The old saying is, whoever does not learn from history is doomed to repeat it. But these people knew the history of their ancestors rejecting God's messengers, and they still repeated the same mistake. What do you need to learn from the past?

I'm not talking about politics. We're not concerned here with the history of our government. Stephen told his listeners a spiritual history, the story of people who were given every gift of God, and yet who repeatedly turned from him, failed to trust in him, and even rejected his messengers, the prophets.

Do you know our history? God has blessed us too. Look at the members of churches in this country. They came from many countries, sometimes fleeing from poverty or war or persecution. God kept them on their journey. He blessed them in a strange land. And here we are, settled and prosperous with many blessings. And what have we done?

We too have been ungrateful and untrusting, worrying about getting earthly things instead of the treasure God desires to give us. What would Stephen have you do?

Prayer: *Father, there have been thousands of generations of believers before me. Let me learn from them, from their challenges and their failures. And let me teach another generation about your faithfulness. Amen.*

Day Three: 1 Peter 2:2-10

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

What does it mean to be mature? We think of leaders in the church as being mature adults in the faith. But Peter describes a mature Christian as one who acts like an infant.

As adults, we pride ourselves on our self-control. We try to view things objectively, dispassionately, not emotionally. Those are all good things, but Peter says we ought to have a longing for God's Word – a passionate desire for it – not just intellectual acceptance of it.

Infants want milk because it stops the aching emptiness in their tummies. They crave milk. Does the true Word do this for you? Are you aware of your emptiness and need? Are you hungry?

Peter says, “crave pure spiritual milk.” But we cannot simply decide to crave something, can we? If we could, I might actually choose to crave many foods that I dislike now, but which I know would be very good for me.

No, we cannot make ourselves desire something. But when we “have tasted that the Lord is good,” then we learn what to desire. There may be times, even with our ordinary food, that we don't feel like eating what we need. But as soon as we take a bite, then we suddenly realize our hunger.

Peter longs for us to discover the spiritual sweetness of knowing how loved we are by our Savior. But... believers often live off of the memories of their last meal. Instead of opening the word, we are content to think about the last time we heard his voice in a sermon or a song.

Babies can't do that. They know their need is immediate, and the solution to their hunger is not in their memory; it is in their mother. And you? What do you need?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I have a long list of things that I desire – things that I miss if they are not in my life on a daily basis. Send me your Spirit and work in my heart so that your word is at the top of that list. Help me to thirst for your word, and to seek it first. Amen.*

Day Four: John 14:1-3

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

What do you look for in a house? Is luxury most important? Privacy? We check so many things to be sure a home will be good. We pay people to inspect the wiring and the walls, and we still find nasty surprises. We look for the perfect home, but even the best seems to have some things we don’t like.

As we look through pictures on websites, as we drive by houses with “for sale” signs in the yard, we are looking for a place that will be more than just a roof over our heads. But what features, what arrangement of rooms will make a house special for us? What is it that turns a house into a home?

The old cliché says that it is the presence of those we love. And as much as I dislike

clichés, this one is profoundly true.

Many people have written about “mansions in heaven.” The old King James translation “in my Father’s house are many mansions” has led some to focus on the idea of grand and glorious dwelling places, curving staircases and vaulted ceilings. But the real focus of those verses is this: “my Father’s house.”

I know that not everyone has happy memories of home. But I hope that anyone can understand the meaning of such a phrase – a place where we are safe. A place where all we need has been provided. More than that, a place where we have always been loved. In other words... home.

This is the comfort Jesus gives to his forlorn disciples. He has warned them that he will leave, that they will be alone. But they will not be alone. They have a place. And it is ready for them.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, I am at home with you. I am a stranger here on earth, but I belong with you. Lord, help me to share my home with those who are homeless. Amen.*