

Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

Acts 6:1-7

In writing Acts, Luke is telling the story of something that went right: the spread of the gospel. But he also has his eyes on those things that could have stopped that spread. He deals with one such threat in this passage.

Identifying the Threat

In Acts 4, Luke identified two strengths of the early church: their unity and their care for the needy. But those two areas were under strain as the church grew:

The Threat of Conflict

Murmuring arose between two groups in the church: Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians. Relational conflict arises when we don't understand one another, when it seems we are coming from two different worlds. It can deflect us from continuing to spread the gospel.

Their dispute was not about a theological or moral issue, but a practical one: the Hellenist widows were not being cared for. Whether in marriages or in churches it is often the practical things, such as money and how it is spent, that produce conflict.

In this situation the church's administrative system was struggling: it hadn't kept up with their growth. But in facing this problem the church faced its second threat:

The Threat of Distraction

If the apostles gave their time to sorting the problem of the widows it would keep them from doing the thing Jesus had told them to do: preach the gospel. It is the threat of distraction: not by something bad, but by something that is good, the care of the needy.

Staying on Task

The apostles don't ignore the complaint, or criticize it. They know that God is the defender of widows and that at the cross Jesus died to abolish ethnic barriers. They also know that a mark of a disciple of Jesus is love for one another. However, they also know that their number one priority is the gospel, and to keep telling people the good news of Jesus.

But they also knew that caring for the needy is vital, so they organized the seven to take on that role, so that each one was doing what God has gifted and called them to do, to ensure that the gospel kept going out.

The lesson for us is that whatever we do, the gospel needs to stay our focus, making sure that people get cared for along the way. It should also encourage us as individuals to make decisions in life, and find our place to serve, that keeps the Gospel spreading out.

God vindicated their decision to do that, by bringing more growth. May he do the same here.