

5 Adaptive Muscles

#4 Sharing Power Worship Resources

Recommended Scriptures

Acts 6:1-7

Choosing leaders for daily distribution to Hellenistic widows.

Exodus 18

Jethro confronts Moses to appoint leaders.

Luke 22:22f

Disciples argue about who is the greatest.

John 13

Jesus washing the disciples' feet.

Acts 15

The Jerusalem counsel moves in a new core direction to be inclusive of Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 12

Different spiritual gifts and equal value amongst giftings.

Romans 12:3f

Grace for different spiritual gifts.

Luke 8:40f

Jesus and the hemorrhaging woman

Luke 9 and Luke 10

Jesus empowers his disciples to spread the gospel in collaboration and mutuality with the people they meet.

Key Themes, Definitions, Theological Ideas

Where is the power in the congregation? In the community?

How is the power dynamic impacting decision-making?

What happens if someone in your church says, "I have a dream for a ministry?"

Power - possession of the ability to wield force, authority, or influence.

Marginalization - treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant or peripheral.

"Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."

- BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Worship Resources (liturgy/hymns/songs/stories/poems, etc.)

Hymns

“Help Us Accept Each Other” UMH 560

“The Servant Song” TFWS 2222

“Child of God” Mark Miller

The Prayer (in the spirit) of St. Francis contains themes of reciprocity and shifting the locus from me to you. If the “me” of the subject pronoun is a person in power, the prayer becomes a resonant yielding of oneself and one’s privilege to others in the circle.

Practices of Sharing Power



Power Mapping is an exercise that helps determine who and how power is distributed

Creating space for those who would not normally lead

Youth Sunday – turn the worship service over to the church’s young people

Inviting the community into church space for ideas of how to serve the community

Transform ministries of compassion to be led by those who are the recipients

Reviewing your church policies and practices of decision-making and initiatives started by lay people

Sermon Outline

Text – Acts 6

¹In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews[a] among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ²So 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. ³Brothers 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 ⁴and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”

⁵This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a

Sermon Outline (cont.)

convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Abstract

This sermon is designed to create space for recognizing where power is centralized in the church setting, what responsible power-sharing looks like, and how we can help those with power locate their limitations and power-sharing responsibility. Too often power goes unrecognized or sharing power goes unsupported because it can feel like a conflict to talk about. This message will act as a catalyst for permission-giving and further conversation for naming and processing power dynamics.

Outline

I. Introduction

- a. The church is growing
 - i. With growth comes the need for structure, systems, and leadership
 - ii. With growth also comes conflict – conflict is inevitable, not the result of someone always doing something bad
 - iii. Whenever we have structure, systems, and conflict, we have the opportunity for unjust patterns and systems to emerge
- b. Widows were not being fed
 - i. How great it is that already by this time there was a shared system of caring for the vulnerable
 - ii. This problem needed solving
- c. The Apostles did not see this as an aspect of their direct service though it was in their leadership
 - i. They need more leaders
 - ii. Leaders are appointed and the work continues
 - iii. This is as far as I have seen this passage applied – the main message is how good it was for the Apostles to see their need for help, understand their calling, and appoint leaders.

II. Locating culture and power

- a. Let's look deeper into some of the details and nuances of the story
- b. Was there a deficit with all of the widows being neglected?
 - i. No, which ones were? The division was based on culture
 - ii. Hebraic – widows from the Jewish background were good. The ones from the gentile background were not

Sermon Outline (cont.)

1. What is the major movement in the Book of Acts? – will the church that is a Jewish Jesus-following movement follow the Holy Spirit and bring Gentiles into the faith? The answer was ‘yes’
 2. But maybe, because the Hellenistic widows were not being fed, there was still some bias with the Jewish believers struggling to accept Gentiles into the faith. Or at least there was bias in their emerging systems and structures
 - c. Who appointed the 7 leaders?
 - i. It was not the Apostles. The Apostles told the people to appoint the leaders in verse and they would grant them authority. This is a good way of sharing power
 1. The people knew the need better than the Apostles. The Apostles told the people to figure out their leaders for the task
 2. The Apostles had the power to just pick who they wanted but they did not use this power. They distributed the power to the people
 3. Then they used their authority to give authority to the seven
 - ii. They picked leaders from the real lived cultural experience as the need
 - d. Who did the people choose?
 - i. Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas
 1. We see Stephen and Philip elsewhere in the text
 - a. They are Greek
 2. The others have Greek names
 - ii. They picked leaders from the real lived cultural experience as the need
- III. Who is qualified to lead/who should have power?
- a. When those with power, distributed the power to those on the ground who were closest to the problem, those on the ground closest to the problem chose those whose culture qualified them to be leaders
 1. So what does this mean for the church?
 - b. What systems do we have?
 - i. Leadership, teaching, hospitality, worship, administration, outreach, and so many others
 1. One leader or leadership body should not govern all of this. Even if there is hierarchical authority that allows them too
 - ii. So who do we allow to choose leaders?
 1. How do we let those most impacted/most influenced by/ those who are closest to choose leaders?
 - a. How do we choose leaders normally?
 2. If those closest to the area chose the leaders to the area, they may choose leaders that are not the norm. That may be good
 - c. This is especially important as we think about our outward-facing ministries
 - i. We may want oversight from someone that we feel safe or represent our interests when we may not be closest to the work or represent the people whom the work is for
 - ii. This is where sharing power becomes real. It is easy to distribute

Sermon Outline (cont.)

power to those who think like us, talk like us, look like us, and act like us. In the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:16-17, “Even the pagans do that...”

- i. We see this all of the time – the church in North America making decisions for churches in the 3rd world just because we have money. Churches in the suburbs think they know best for churches in disinvested urban cores. Those who have benefited from gentrification making decisions about the gentrified. Frankly, white people act like we know what is best for people of color by hoarding resources or being gatekeepers

IV. Conclusion

- a. If sharing power is a muscle, then it may be a muscle that we may need to take to the gym. The thing about having power is that those who have it default to keeping it. And we have all sorts of rationale for doing like the pagans
 - i. In name of stewardship, safety, comfort, tradition, etc., it is easier to keep control
- b. However, there is one with power greater than the power we hold on to. Perhaps the great Power Holder is calling us to a new faith path. One that is defined not by how we grow things for the Kingdom but how we distribute power to those who are socio-culturally, geographically, or economically closer to what we are being called to

Quotes and Further Study



*Red, Brown, Yellow, Black,
and White: Who's More
Precious in God's Sight*

by Leroy Barber

“Religion must not go from the greatest to the least or the power would appear to be of [humans].”

– JOHN WESLEY

“For most of human history, the rules of power were clear: power was something to be seized and then jealously guarded. This “old power” was out of reach for the vast majority of people. But our ubiquitous connectivity makes possible a different kind of power. “New power” is made by many. It is **open, participatory, and peer-driven.**”

– JEREMY HEIMANS AND
HENRY TIMMS,
New Power

“The miracle of the tongue [at Pentecost] was the Holy Spirit’s inspiration to the powerless to see that they were blessed in their weakness. In that blessedness they found strength to speak out and proclaim the mighty works of God. . . . The ‘devout Jews from every nation . . .’ were the powerful. They were given the miracle of the ear, the gift of listening and understanding.”

– ERIC LAW,
The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb

Continuum of the Muscle of Shared Power

Below is a continuum, employing the metaphor of a muscle, for pondering the different ways in which old power and new power are blended in the church in more or less healthy ways. Where is your church along this continuum?

Weakened: Power is concentrated either with the clergy and staff and/or a few key members. If an influence chart were drawn, most arrows of influence would point away from that small group. Program planners make decisions with the approval of these specific people in mind.

Stretching: People can identify where the power resides and understand it is more centralized than they would prefer. They may generally feel comfortable with those few powerful leaders doing the difficult work of making the church's big decisions. While they might be interested in exploring a broader base of leadership, they are uncertain about how or even whether to seek change in these configurations of power.

Flexing: Members are encouraged to discern how God is calling them to serve in the congregation. Certain structures give primary decision-making roles to a few specific individuals, but shared leadership is increasingly more visible in the church's life and ministry. There is a tentativeness in the trust between older and newer leaders, but some exploratory partnering is beginning to occur.

Thriving: The church experiences a broad sharing of ideas, decision-making, and leadership within the context of a system in which clergy, staff, and lay leaders are given specific authority to lead the church, but exercise that authority transparently and graciously. People tend to speak freely in meetings and consideration is given to all opinions around the table. Pastors and other leaders intentionally work to cultivate diverse leadership. This broad effort of gift identification and gift-sharing is evident at all levels of the church's life and ministry. The prevailing orientation is that "we are all empowered by the Spirit for the work of ministry."