

“Leaders Needed”¹

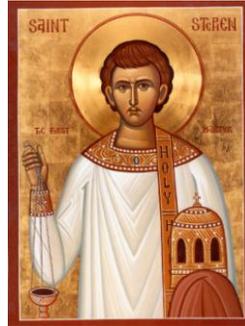
Acts 6:1-4, 8²

Fifth Sunday of Easter – May 22, 2011

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“Attention! Leaders Needed!”

- God provides ...
 - Moses
 - John
 - Luther
 - You???



Throughout history God has always provided His Holy Christian Church with leaders. These saints, these heroes of the faith, have often moved at times and in ways totally unexpected.

Consider, for example, Moses. From infancy he was raised to fear the Lord, the God of Israel. He grew up in the household of the Egyptian Pharaoh, learning the ways of culture and government. Forty years he spent working for his father-in-law, shepherding sheep. All this in preparation for God calling him into service, to be the greatest leader Israel would ever know, the man who would bring them out of slavery, and into the promised land.

¹ PR: CP: 67:307

² Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible – English Standard Version ©2001 by Crossways Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. Used by permission

Or, consider John, the disciple of Jesus. Often he referred to himself as “the disciple Jesus loved.” He was there, in the garden called Gethsemane. He was there, in the palace of Caiaphas. He was there, at the foot of the cross. He was there, at the empty tomb. All of these events prepared John to be a leader of the early church. After all the other disciples had died, John continued to proclaim the good news of salvation.

Move ahead 1500 years, to Martin Luther. His early life was marked by inner struggles, battles of conscience, searching to find peace in a Church that offers none. All this to prepare him to be God’s instrument for the reform of the medieval church.

Then bring yourself to 2011. How is God using you today? He has, you know, given you many unique growth opportunities. All of the challenging times, the frustrations, the difficulties, He allowed you to walk through them as He has prepared you for service to Him.

People often talk about a person’s destiny. As we look at Stephen, we will see that God placed him in just the right place, at just the right time, to do the work which God had planned in advance for him to do.

Acts 6:1-2a – The First Meeting

- Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples

As Peter and the other disciples faithfully proclaimed the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, one of the outcomes was, the Church in Jerusalem grew. With growth came challenges. It is perfectly logical – and at times necessary, when one person or a small group of people are leading, to simply let them lead. The disciples were doing a good job of leading. At least, they did a good job when the group was relatively small.

As is human nature, some people are satisfied, some are ok with things, and some complain. This is especially true when you have two groups as diverse as the Grecians and the Hebrews. Grecians were unbelievers and pagans prior to coming to the saving knowledge of Jesus. Hebrews were the people who claimed a godly heritage stretching more than forty generations back to Abraham. Grecians believers saw little value in traditions, while Hebrews were steeped in tradition.

While religious and even theological issues would not separate them, temporal issues could and would cause problems. The Grecians thought they were being treated

unfairly by the Hebrews. The result is the first Voter's Assembly meeting for the new Christian Church.

Acts 6:2b

- "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables."
- **Meditatio** = Study, meditate, quietly ruminate.
- **Oratio** = Speak the Word
- **Tentatio** = Face the temptations of the flesh, the world, and the Prince of Darkness (Satan).

The agenda for the meeting was quite simple. The twelve disciples no doubt met as a group in advance of this meeting. They had synthesized the issue down to a very simple resolution. Put in typical language of today, this resolution would have one "whereas" and one "resolved." *"Whereas: It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables."*

If you were to walk into my office, on the white-board you would find three Latin words. I keep these words on the board because they help me stay focused on my real "job description." I keep them there because it is very easy to get sidetracked with all the other stuff that can take one away from the real heart of pastoral ministry. Peter and the others used the phrases, "preaching the Word," and "waiting on tables" to describe the "important" vs. the "immediate."

The first of the Latin words is **"MEDITATIO"**. If a pastor is to faithfully carry out his vocation, it starts with

adequate time for meditation. Meditation isn't just sitting around. Meditation involves devotion to the Word. It is digging in and learning. It's the time one spends in prayer, not only for the Sermon, but for the people of God, for the ministry of the Church, and all the other prayer areas as well. It's the "thinking time," that so easily gets lost in the rush of the day.

The second word is **“ORATIO”**. Paul describes this well to Timothy when he says, *“... preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”*³ In addition to the weekend worship, this is, for me, the dozen or so emails from people, asking faith questions. This is the phone calls, the pastoral visits, the discussions with members that allow opportunity to share the Word of God.

Then comes the third Latin word: **“TENTATIO”**. This is the most difficult of the three. “Tentatio” translates best as “temptation.” Just as you face temptations, so do I. Just as you struggle, so do I. Just as you find yourself often busy with things that really are not all that significant, so do I, and so did the disciples in our text for today. And so they called the meeting.

³ 2 Timothy 4:2

Acts 6:3-4

The First Motion – Division of Duties

- Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”
 - Seven will handle the “day to day duties.”
 - Twelve will handle “prayer and the Word.”

“Whereas: It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables; therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom. Assign to them the daily management of the distribution of food.”

I would envision that this was a difficult decision for the twelve to make, bringing this issue to the whole church. It is hard to give up any part of one’s vocation. It’s easy to get the pastoral vocation confused with the jobs and tasks that need to be done. There is an old saying that often takes me away from where I truly ought to be. It’s the perfectionists motto: *“If you want something done right, ...”* You know the rest, *“do it yourself.”* The problem is, what is right is not always what we do, when we do it ourselves, is it?

So, they proposed the appointment of seven to handle the day-to-day distribution of food. And before anyone could ask, or question this request, they added, ***“We will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.”***

Meditatio – Oratio – Tentatio. This pleased the group, and they a group of seven, headed by Stephen.

Here comes the difficult part of this text. How can I say this without it sounding harsh? The Church at large ... and the Church local ... needs people willing to step up and lead.

Matthew 9:37 – God's Labor Problem

- “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few ...”
- The need for Professional Church workers
 - Three Seminaries (St. Louis, Fort Wayne, St. Katherine's, Ontario, Canada)
 - 149 Pastors (10 awaiting calls)
 - 132 Vicars
 - 10 Deaconess'

We need both pastoral and lay leadership. Jesus spoke to this issue in Matthew 9: ***“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”***⁴

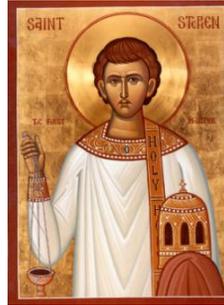
There is a need for **professional church workers.** On the screen are the numbers from this year's crop of new pastors, of men going out for internships, and of women entering the diaconate of our Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. Thank the Lord for these young (and not so young) people who are dedicating their lives to the ministry of the Word.

But, as important as it is to have solid church workers, it is even more important to have laity willing to step up and lead.

⁴ Matthew 9:37

What about Concordia?

- The Urgent Need for Lay Workers
 - MLB
 - Elders
 - Ushers
 - Lector's
 - Volunteer in the ECC
 - Communion Assistants
 - Buildings and Grounds
 - Lutheran High School

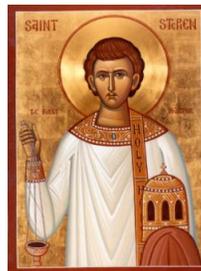


In your bulletin today are all kinds of opportunities to step up to the plate and lead. I will be perfectly honest with you, I find it frustrating when we ask, and receive back very little response. Sometimes I wonder why we ask.

I do rejoice and thank the Lord for all of you who do volunteer, and do step up to lead. But we could use more help.

Common Answers/Excuses

- “But, Pastor ...”
- God made Stephen what He was ... a man of bold conviction and faith.
- God gave Stephen what he needed.



It is so easy to say, “But, pastor... I’ve done my part, let someone else lead.” “But pastor, I’m afraid I’d say or do the wrong thing.”

Every one of us, starting with myself, are experts at one thing; we all know how to make excuses, we all know how to say “no” to opportunities.

Stephen could well have said “not me.” He could have argued he didn’t have the skill-set to do such work. Instead, he allowed the Lord to equip him. He let his love for the Lord be enough. And God provided the rest.

Acts 6:8 Are you a Stephen?

- “And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people.”
- Growing
- Studying
- Sharing
- Living
- Serving Christ from Cradle to Crown

An icon of Saint Stephen, a young man with a halo, wearing a white robe and a gold sash. He is holding a chalice in his right hand and a book in his left. The background is gold with the words "SAINT" and "STEPHEN" written in gold letters.

We sang a few moments ago these words: **“If you cannot ...”** Each of the “cannot’s” was followed with a **“you can.”** Opportunities are everywhere.

We have been blessed with the only truth that brings salvation to people’s lives. We have been given the presence of God to guide our daily lives, and the promise of God to uphold and sustain us even to life eternal. There are many ways to thank the Lord for all the blessings He has given us.

Will you step up to the plate? Will you let God stretch your abilities and talents? Will you be like Stephen, growing, studying, sharing, living, “serving Christ from cradle to crown”?

Please pray with me:

"Thy Strong Word" # 328 v. 5

*Give us lips to sing Thy glory,
Tongues Thy mercy to proclaim,
Throats that shout the hope that fills us,
Mouths to speak Thy holy name.
Alleluia, alleluia!
May the light which Thou dost send
Fill our songs with alleluias,
Alleluias without end!*

"Thy Strong Word" # 328 v. 6

*God the Father, light-creator,
To Thee laud and honor be.
To Thee, Light of Light begotten,
Praise be sung eternally.
Holy Spirit, light-revealer,
Glory, glory be to Thee.
Mortals, angels, now and ever
Praise the holy Trinity!
* * **