

Nokesville UMC Sunday Worship [Trinity Sunday & 118th Anniversary]
June 4, 2023
Rev. YoungMin Kim

Harmony between Old and New
Acts 6:1-7

(1)

Today is our church's 118th anniversary. According to our tradition, we are having a tent service remembering our church history, giving thanks to God for pouring out His love and grace upon our church during the past 118 years, and celebrating our church's birthday with delicious food. And I thank our church members who set up the tent, prepared for worship together, and brought delicious food to share with each other.

Celebrating our church's anniversary, let me carry out a simple survey on the spot like we did on our last anniversary. I will give you a second. Please think how long it has been since you joined Nokesville Methodist Church, either with or without membership. And then, I will call year ranges. So, if you are in the year range I call, please stand, and we will recognize you. Okay, let me start with less than one year. If you have joined with us in the past year, please stand. (applause) We have had no official chance to recognize our new members during the worship service. On behalf of all Nokesville Methodist Church members, I welcome you with our sincere hearts. Please be seated. Next, between one year and ten years. Please stand if you have joined with us more than one year and up to ten years. (applause) How about between eleven years and twenty years? Please stand if you have joined with us more than eleven years and up to twenty years. (applause) How about between twenty-one years and thirty years? Please stand if you have joined with us more than twenty years and up to thirty years. (applause) How about between thirty-one years and forty years? Please stand if you have joined with us more than thirty-one years and up to forty years. (applause) How about forty-one years or more? Please stand! (applause) You are the living history of Nokesville Methodist Church. No matter how long you have been with us, you are all part of Nokesville Methodist Church who remember our past, live the present, and pass on the future.

(2)

Today, I want to continue to talk about the first church on earth—the Jerusalem church. After the Pentecost experience, Jesus's disciples and followers became filled with the Holy Spirit and began to proclaim the good news about Jesus with assurance, courage, and experience. Numerous Jews coming to Jerusalem from all over the country and from outside the country came to hear the Spirit-filled proclamation, to be touched in their mind, heart, and spirit, and to accept and decide to follow Jesus. As a result, the first faith community—the Jerusalem church—was founded with the apostles and Jesus's old and new followers.

As a church, they devoted themselves to the righteous teaching of the apostles, constant fellowship with each other, and fervent prayers to God. In addition, they sold their possessions, shared them in common, and distributed them to all in need. They also spent much time together praising God in the church, and shared the bread and the cup as well as meals with glad and generous hearts at home.

But the first church and the church members did not live in favorable circumstances all the time. When the apostles proclaimed the good news and performed many wonders and signs in the name of Jesus in public places, Jewish authorities such as priests, Pharisees, scribes, and Sadducees paid attention to, arrested, and persecuted the apostles and the followers. But Christian DNA is very unique. The harsher they persecuted the Christians, the more the Christians became vitalized and revived. In the midst of observation and persecution, the Christians did not cease to live as Jesus's faithful disciples (5:42). Under the subtle tensions between the Jewish authorities and the first Christians, God added to their number by domestic Jews who spoke in Hebrew (probably the majority) and Jews overseas who spoke in Greek (the minority). It must have been a great blessing to have unity in diversity in the church.

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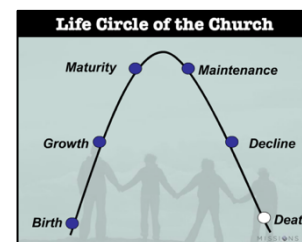
However, as the number of the church members increased, unexpected problems came to occur in the church. One of them was well described in today's passage. Greek-speaking church members complained against the Hebrew-speaking church members because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution of food. We do not know whether this problem occurred just by unintentional mistakes or by intentional bullying. But it seemed that the neglect occurred frequently, so the Greek-speaking members could contain themselves no longer and burst out.

In order to resolve the problem, the twelve apostles called all church members and said, "It isn't right for us to set aside proclamation of God's word in order to serve tables" (6:2, *CEB*). And they continued, "Therefore, brothers and sisters, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who we may appoint to this task while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word" (v. 3-4). So, they selected seven faithful men—Stephen, Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas—and assigned them the ministry of service. And the apostles finally could focus on their ministry of the word thanks to the seven deacons.

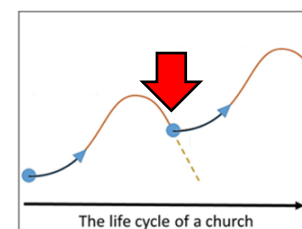
Here, we come to have an interesting point. That is, were all the names of the seven deacons Hebrew names or Greek names? They were all Greek names! In other words, all the selected deacons were Greek-speaking members coming from Palestine, Asia Minor, or Rome. And Nicolas was a Gentile who converted to Judaism first and to Christianity later. Now, there came to be two different leading groups in the Jerusalem church—apostles who were all Hebrew-speaking men and who assumed the responsibilities of the word, and deacons who were all Greek-speaking men who assumed the responsibilities of service. With the combination of the different membership, did other tensions occur between the two groups and in the church? I don't think so. The two different groups worked together with their own callings and gifts—one for elders and the other for deacons defined with Methodist terms. According to their callings and gifts, they served the church and the community. As a result, verse 7 says, "The word of God continued to spread; the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith."

(4)

A year ago, at the 117th church anniversary, I shared a message about the "Life Circle of the Church": Birth→Growth→Maturity→Maintenance→Decline→Death. Passing through the pandemic and experiencing a relatively slow recovery, we were in decline. Or our decline might have already started in the early 2010s. And I alerted you that unless we could make a turnaround, we would have no future and would be one of the churches to be closed in the near future.



Exactly one year has passed. During the past year, we have gone through difficult and painful procedures, and now we stand at the 118th church anniversary. Please look around! Have we made a notable turnaround compared to last year? Regarding not only the number of worship attendants but our spirituality in relation to worship, mission, and ministries, have we made a turnaround?



Now, I want to challenge both current and new members. Recalling the cooperation for the church and the community between the Hebrew-speaking and the Greek-speaking members or between the current and the new members within the Jerusalem church, I ask all of you to be unified with Christ's heart and Christ's vision and to cooperate with each other for the church and for the Nokesville community. Current members, please consider new members. Welcome them, help them adapt to new circumstances, and invite them to the church ministries. New members, this is your church! Open your hearts and come to other members first. For the kingdom of God here in this church and in this community, please be involved in the mission opportunities with the current members. If you stay on the right path in the sight of God, He will pour out His love, grace, and blessings upon you and upon the church so that at the 119th anniversary next year, you will come to witness another notable turnaround. Amen.