

World Upside Down: The Book of Acts

Acts 6

1. When you think of “essential service,” what comes to mind?

2. Spiritual growth doesn’t preclude mundane conflict (v. 1).

Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.

- James 5:9

Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.” And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me. And they said, “Let us rise up and build.” So they strengthened their hands for the good work. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and despised us and said, “What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?”

- Nehemiah 2:17-19

3. The ministry of the Word is set apart from other vital duties (vv. 2-4).

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer (Greek, *episcopos*), he desires a noble task.

- 1 Timothy 3:1

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints, for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ.

- Ephesians 4.11

So that we may obtain this faith (i.e., the faith in Christ that makes us righteous), the ministry of preaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given.

- Augsburg Confession V

4. Seemingly pedestrian problems occasion spiritual service (v. 5).

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

- Romans 12:3-8

The precepts of God and the true service of God are obscured when men hear that only monks are in a state of perfection. For Christian perfection is to fear God from the heart, and yet to conceive great faith, and to trust that for Christ's sake we have a God who has been reconciled, to ask of God, and assuredly to expect His aid in all things that, according to our calling, are to be done; and meanwhile, to be diligent in outward good works, and to serve our calling. In these things consist the true perfection and the true service of God.

- Augsburg Confession XVII §49-50

God, with all his angels and creatures smiles when the [Christian] father is washing diapers, because he is doing so in faith.

- Luther

5. The laying on of hands signifies the ongoing sending of the Spirit (v. 6).

There's (at least) four functions of the laying on of hands in the NT:

i. Continuation of OT practice

And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- Deuteronomy 34:9; cf. Numbers 8.10

ii. For prayer and healing

And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight."

- Acts 9:11-12; cf. Matthew 9.18

iii. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

- Acts 19:6; cf. Acts 8.15-17

iv. Ordination and consecration to Office

And when they had appointed (literally, "laid hands upon") elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

- Acts 14.23

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

- 1 Timothy 4:14

6. Leadership–multiplication leads to disciple–multiplication (v. 7).

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful people, who will be able to teach others also.

- 2 Timothy 2:1–2

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

- Matthew 28:18–20

7. Stephen follows in the footsteps of His Lord (vv. 8–15).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.”

- Jesus, in John 14:12

Now the chief priests and the whole council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’”

- Matthew 26:59–61

8. The essential service of the kingdom of God is to serve our neighbors—in whatever calling we have been given.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

- Ephesians 2:10