

## OUR LOUDEST WITNESS – **Ministry, Our Greatest Effort**

When we examine our foundational values as a Church these four are present.

**Diversity** – our warmest welcome

**Community** – our strongest bond

**Ministry** – our best effort

**Generosity** – our boldest gift

Ministry – our best effort - **Acts 6:1-10**

**The Oath of the Horatii** and “**single combat**” - *when one warrior or soldier from each army fights another to resolve the conflict.*

**Troy** – multiple instances where we see “**single combat**”

- 2 giant armies, in a standoff, seemingly ready for battle
- Generals agreeing to let each side’s best fighter compete for victory that day

The ancient historian **Polybius**, in his famous work “The Histories” on the Roman Empire, wrote “*Many Romans have volunteered to engage in single combat so as to decide a whole battle.*”

Similar practice lives on... in religion.

Per the ancient history encyclopedia: “***There is no culture recorded in human history which has not practiced some form of religion.***”

And common and all but universal throughout this history of religion:

- There are religious rituals and liturgies to ceremonialize personal devotion.
- And within the rituals is the creation of religious hierarchy with priests, mediums, witch doctors, etc.

Unlike the cases of “single combat” found sprinkled into history, this version of religion that “outsources” worship is almost universal and constant. Instead of **single combat** it’s **single ministry**.

***We are naturally inclined to outsource our spiritual devotion and religious obligations.***

And it’s found in the Church today.

We hire a minister, and the congregation pays clergy to do the work of “ministry.”

**Ephesians 4:12** says that the pastor and teacher’s responsibility is “*to equip the saints (er’body) for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ*”

The work of ministry, this call to our best effort... it’s for all of us.

I believe one reason the gap between the volume of the early church’s witness and its impact is so much greater than our modern Western church – is our concept of ministry.

We can overcome **misconceptions** by looking at the Church’s **inception**.

In his opening statements at Pentecost, Peter quotes Joel... *'In the last days,' God says, 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams. In those days I will pour out my Spirit even on my servants—men and women alike—and they will prophesy.'*

This verse gets to the diversity of the faces that would minister in the church. Young and old. Men and women. Everybody. The call to ministry is for everyone.

Tonight I want to focus on ministry as our best effort, and how ministry can amplify our witness when we ALL recognize our call to it.

I was called to full time ministry the moment I gave my life to Christ.  
To give my best effort and minister in and through the Church.

I want to look at ministry as our best effort and how it amplifies our witness through three lenses – the royal priesthood, the holy spirit and our own purity.

**The call to ministry is a call for everyone. For everyday people.**

Think about it: the Holy Spirit at Pentecost fell on a diverse group of 120 people as Pastor Fred highlighted last weekend. There were likely fishermen, tax collectors, the poor, merchants, soldiers and more in that room. Everyday people of every variety. Not just priests or religious leaders from the temple. God wants to use everyday people of all shapes and sizes now, just like he did at Pentecost.

**Pentecost** and the birth of the church  
**parallels Sinai** and the birth of God's nation the Israelites in many ways.

At Sinai in Exodus God says to Israel in **Exodus 19:5-6:**  
*if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation. This is the message you [Moses] must give to the people of Israel."*

Israel dropped the ball as a priesthood of believers from the outset, losing 3000.  
The Church picks up the mantle and picks up 3000.

In our culture we often think of priests like this - in an isolated career, a role of people within organized religion.

Peter in his later letter to the church points again to Sinai and this concept of a priesthood when he writes in **1 Peter 2:9** – *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*

No longer is the priesthood a matter of lineage and the inherited privilege of direct access to God. We're all called to it.

Peter – having experienced the explosion in the Church after Pentecost, and writing the church here in his letter – he says from first hand experience - **our witness is amplified when it's done together as the Church.**

We see a need arise in Acts chapter six that Pastor Fred pointed to briefly last weekend as he preached on diversity. They were correcting an injustice. Food distribution was inequitable because of what amounts to racism. Jews were favoring other Jews over Gentiles. The ministry needed correction and leadership.

The apostles say in verse 2:

*“It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables.*

It's hard to get around- is that a tone of condescension? Like it wasn't worth their best effort?

**Acts 6:2** – in the original Greek, the word for serve is diakoneo.

It's also the same word used just verses later in “serving” the Word in verse 4. Because diakoneo in the Greek means ministry.

Whether working in the word or putting food on tables - it's ministry.

The life of the church and its growing witness depended on best efforts put to both.

**“Full of the Holy Spirit.”**

The first person in Scripture who the Holy Spirit comes upon... it happens at Sinai. Not Moses. But Bezalel. He led the construction of the Bible's first worship center.

In Acts 6 we again see the Spirit's anointing connected to the work of ministry and serving.

These seven tagged to serve in this ministry were arguably the first “deacons” we see in Acts, ordained by the laying on of hands. And it was notably not for platformed roles with was for day to day administration and service.

**James 1:27** says:

***Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.***

James points to the exact ministry that Stephen was a part of in Acts 6.

But we emphasize purity in ways that have nothing to do with actively caring for and ministering to the marginalized and suffering... which is what James points directly to.

We've made purity about what we don't do. What we abstain from.

James ties the purity of our worship to ministry. Ministry that calls for our best effort.

Christ came not to be served but TO serve.

You could argue you never look more like Christ and have a more pure witness than when you're serving and ministering to others.

**Matthew 25** mission moments = rallying as the Church around organizations that minister to the marginalized. It's because of Matthew 25 where Jesus says that anything we do unto the least of these we do unto him.

And because of passages like James 2, where James ties pure religion to ministry. The very same ministry that Stephen was walking in and giving his best effort.

Luke's next sentence: **So the Word of God spread.**  
Another way to say that: **So the Church's witness was amplified.**

For City Life to have its loudest witness... it will take all of us asking...  
"Am I walking in Stephen's shoes?"

Bringing that question home: are you serving in a ministry monthly to continue to build this church together?

As Stephen served it says he did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. But we see that when the ministry God called him to meet his best effort, he witnessed the goodness of God.

Stephen is soon martyred.  
**It's easy when you read about martyrs to glorify giving your life for Jesus.**

**But before Stephen could GIVE his life for the Gospel, he LIVED it.**  
Obedience moment by moment, assignment by assignment, applied with his best effort.

And we see the Word of God spread.  
The witness was amplified.  
And Jesus was easy to find.

We want to make Jesus easy to find in the 757.  
Let's walk in his shoes.