



## May 4 - Better

Earlier this week, I was reminded of a story from the early 1990s. It was a time that saw expansion in various restaurant chains. One of these restaurant chains was Boston Market. This chain was rapidly spreading across the United States. It grew so fast that it made some of the Vice Presidents at Chick-fil-a nervous. How would they keep up. The executives held a meeting and frantically produced plans for rapid growth to keep up with Boston Market.

The founder of Chick-fil-a, S. Truett Cathy sat quietly, until he could not do so any longer. He boldly told them they were all wrong. They should not focus on getting bigger. The focus needed to be on getting better. His belief was that if you get better, the customers will demand that you get bigger. Instead of growth, Chick-fil-a would focus on improving every aspect of the restaurant. History tells us that Chick-fil-a made the right choice.

What we find in these first verses of Chapter 6 is the early Christian Church struggling with the realities of growing too quickly. There are infrastructure problems. The newer Hellenist members are not receiving the same level of care as others. There is a void in the process. In short, there was a focus on getting bigger, and now they needed to figure out how to get, well, better.

The solution is simple yet still seems profound today. In short, lean into the gifts within the community. The church at the time had the belief that the church needed to center around those who knew Jesus the best, his disciples. This led to everything slowing as these 12 (Matthias was added) were not able to keep up. So, they held a meeting and solved the problem, they leaned into the gifts of the community.

The church viewed these tasks of the community to be every bit as important as preaching. Sometimes, people read into the text a sort of hierarchy of roles within the early church. It is not there in the text. The text highlights the opposite. The role of care for others, along with the everyday details of the community, are equally as important as the teaching and preaching.

This was revolutionary. The church had been focused on the sacrificial system, which centered around priests. It also heavily relied on the work of the elders and teachers to make sure people knew how to behave. This new model rose out of necessity. It was no longer practical for everything to center around the disciples. There was an increase in people. There was a need for infrastructure. There was a need to be better.

This new model of ministry from the first century is still revolutionary today. There are still plenty of people who place the work of pastor or priest on a pedestal. The role becomes elevated and filled with unrealistic expectations. There is incredible gravity into this mindset. Meanwhile, there are those who feel underserved by the church, much like the Hellenists in the text. They feel like the church is focused on others. They want to be included in the life of the community.

The journey to the solution is just as revolutionary as the solution itself. The church goes to the Hellenists to find an answer. Then, the church immediately ordains, or sets apart, Hellenists for this work. The church looked to those who were oppressed to find an answer, and then immediately selected leaders from within. This is a beautiful testimony to what the church can be.

Jesus broke down barriers, and the early church was willing to break down even more barriers. There was a willingness to see the value in the gifts of all and to find ways to work together to meet the needs of all. We have seen a similar shift here at Grace in recent years. The development of ministries that grow from within are a beautiful testament to the work of the Spirit. We are getting better. Which is a good thing. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt