How many know that when there is growth, there is always going to be something called “Growing pains?” Let’s turn our attention to the Word of the Lord today as we return to the Acts and we will read.

**Text: Acts 6:1-7**

It has been a couple of weeks since we looked at the Acts together and the last time we were together we looked at the apostles’ power, their arrest and release and then their suffering for the sake of what they believed and proclaimed. Two of the key passages informed us that they spoke the words of this new life and they filled Jerusalem with the teachings of Jesus! (Acts 5:28) When the Holy Spirit is around, preaching is sure to follow.

And then a couple of messages before the last one, we looked at kingdom life and the very first tare/weed that had been sown into God’s kingdom and “wheat harvesting” works by the devil. No one can forget Ananias and Saphira!

Today we will have a look at the second tare sown among the believers and yet another attempt of the enemy to disunify this new and dynamic community of preaching believers.

I. **Growing but with some growing pains**

Our teaching begins today with a great problem to have, community stress that is caused by growth. The believers were increasing in numbers.

There is one thing that I can absolutely guarantee this morning. If a community of people filled with the Spirit tells their friends, neighbours and co-workers about Jesus and their life changing experience because of their own personal experience with the faith, numbers will increase. Some churches in growing communities can gather a crowd with good marketing and they may be able to recycle a few saints around and call it growth, but true growth comes from Holy Spirit influenced preaching and conversions. As any family grows quickly, we all know there are adjustments and stresses and that is exactly what is taking place in Jerusalem. And now on to the second tare!

II. **The second tare**

As we look at the second tare, we remember Jesus’ words found in Matthew’s gospel:

*He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,* 25 *but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away.* 26 *So when the plants came up and bore grain,* 27 *then the weeds appeared also.* 28 *And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ’Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’* 29 *He said to them, ’An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ’Then do you want us to go and gather them?’* 30 *But he said, ’No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them.* 31 *Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’* (Matthew 13:24-30)
And now in the Acts we are seeing this worked out practically, the great kingdom seed is being sowed by God in Jerusalem and the enemy is right there to sow a tare! Here is the second tare, and are you ready, “The Hellenists murmured.” (See Acts 6:1) And you might be asking me the question “Is that all, Pastor? Murmuring is not so serious, and it’s not one of the biggie sins!”

For anyone who has grown up in the church, you would be very familiar with the list of “don’ts” that formed an unofficial list of unpardonable sins and you all know what they are. We have come a long way in sorting out real sins away from tradition so hurray for progress! Having said that, I am of the opinion that a lot of Christians fail to walk in step with the Spirit enough and engage scripture enough to even have a good sense of what sin is.

But as we ponder the list that I have referred to, Christians often have neglected things that are a little less obvious and yet equally sinful. Let’s talk murmuring for a moment because it is not a lesser sin, a minor sin or problem.

1. Murmuring defined

Here is a pretty decent definition of murmuring, “A half suppressed muttering or complaint!” And there are a whole lot of synonyms....

2. Some biblical examples of murmuring

i. A rebellion against authority kind of murmuring

Miriam and Aaron ‘spoke against’ Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. And they said, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” And the LORD heard it. Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth. And suddenly the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron and Miriam, “Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting.” And the three of them came out. And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the entrance of the tent and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forward. And he said, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them, and he departed. When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow. (Numbers 12: 1-10)

The good news is Moses prayed and talked God out of killing his sister!

ii. A perceived lack or clamorous murmuring

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” (Exodus 16:1-3)
iii. An anti Jesus murmuring

People can become so deceived that they can even mutter against Jesus Himself!

And there was much murmuring about him among the people. While some said, “He is a good man,” others said, “No, he is leading the people astray.” (John 7:12)

There are so many more examples and I just don’t have time for them! But here is some instruction for us from Paul and we will call it the antidote for murmuring.

3. The antidote for murmuring

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world... (Philippians 2:14-15)

It is the crooked and perverse generation that murmurs and we are to be nothing like them.

4. A warning against murmuring for the New Testament Church

And here is a warning for us just in case we missed Paul’s instructions.

We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. (1 Corinthians 10:9-10)

Well, alright then, let’s just be honest. Everyone in this room who has ever sinned by muttering against God, Jesus, the pastor, the deacons, the music...go ahead and start throwing your stones!

So, let’s have a closer look at the Acts 6 case for murmuring and it is of the lack and clamorous kind.

The Hellenists were complaining...

You will need a bit of a history lesson to get your mind around what is happening. In Jerusalem there would have been some semblance of a social network with a system of distribution of food to the poor, the transient visitors to Jerusalem and especially to widows without children who could and often did starve to death. And in addition, there would have been a common fund administered by the Apostles themselves.

The Hellenists and their widows were Greek speaking Jews who had returned to Palestine from the diaspora and often for the purpose of just wanting to be near Jerusalem for their eventual burial. The Jews from Jerusalem spoke Aramaic, a form of Hebrew; however, the Hellenists did not speak any form of Hebrew.

We have a couple of problems here on our hands, the language barrier and then the problem of the murmuring itself.

III. A business meeting

Everyone knows that whenever we have a problem, the right response is a business meeting, right?
1. There is wisdom in communal (community/family) discernment

I have spent an enormous amount of time looking at church government in all of its forms. There are three of them: Congregational, Presbyterian and Episcopate types. You can just look at the first three centuries of the church’s existence and see the three types in operation and each kind in operation today would claim that theirs is the most pure and biblical form of church government and governance.

The older I get and the more I study, the more I am convinced that we have freedom in the Holy Spirit to organize in any way that is culturally appropriate and does not contradict the scriptures and that our congregational form is still the best ship afloat. I have become increasingly egalitarian in my approach to church governance and even more convinced of the equality of all Christians as Prophets, Priests and Kings!

Now having said that, you can study the various words in the New Testament that have to do with oversight, rulership, and eldership and there is an obvious mandate to organize for the sake of rulership, but rulership of the New Testament kind is more of the notion of protecting and caring for people. I am right back to the place of an old fashioned shepherding approach.

Having said all that, I find the greatest safety and church health in all of us where possible and practical getting together and “discerning” all matters that are important.

2. The murmuring had caused an additional problem of wrong prioritization

One of the biggest problems of murmuring is that it will spiral into other tare problems.

*And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.* (Acts 6:2)

If you are prone to murmuring to get your own way around here or just because you have become a bitter and miserable Christian, you need to be very careful about the distraction that you are causing because I am quite sure that the Lord does not want His workers distracted by your murmuring!

3. Community discernment produces wisdom where the community is godly (Every time)

Wherever a community discerns effectively, whether a family unit or a church, when God’s wisdom is sought, it will be given.

*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* 6 *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.* 7 *For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord;* 8 *he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* (James 1:6-8)

The apostles present the issue, “We know we have both a food and a murmuring problem but we can’t react and cause yet another one. We cannot neglect prayer and the ministry of the Word to wait on tables.”
Now what is not being said here is that the Apostles think themselves too special to help with practical things around the church. Most of these apostles are working class and uneducated men and they are no strangers to doing their part of the work.

The danger to the ministry here is that the Apostles are in this moment and season the primary mouthpieces for God, the mandate is to preach the gospel as quickly as possible in a hostile environment and they are the most important and trained resources for the task right now. They are the bible, living bibles!

For the sake of the newcomers to the church, anyone who works closely with me understands that I have a very strong belief that I must be prepared to preach and wash toilets and get the vacuum out myself after a church event. I do lead by example in this regard. We can have a lot of fun together while we clean up; however, I do expect the church to respond to your appointed leadership and authority as you are instructed to do in the New Testament.

4. God’s wisdom seeks to find right God solutions to growing pain problems

It is an amazing thing when a family or church has a situation in front of it that may seem to be tense or has the potential to disrupt the unity of the church. But if we are patient enough, determined enough to do things God’s way, a right solution will be found.

Here is the right way to go about things:

i. Begin discerning with finding a right and peaceful solution as a goal

“Therefore friends,.....”

Like good old Stephen Covey teaches us in the leadership world, “Begin with the end in mind.” When we face a problem we need to solve together, we decide in advance that we will sow to peace and that our focus will always be what is right, not who is right!

Let’s see how the Apostles do with their situation. The job of widow food management is important and here is the job description!

“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. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:3-5)

I also suspect what is taking place here is that God is providing an opportunity for gifted people to show themselves faithful in small things before bigger things are given to them.

My testimony and history of serving the church supports this principle. Being a pastor is perhaps the least technically difficult of the leadership jobs I have held in my lifetime. When I became a Christian and until I went into a full time and paid ministry position, I held some very responsible leadership and management positions. At one point I was responsible for over 1.2 Billion in sales as a marketing/product manager.

When I became a Christian, I thought my abilities should be recognized at once and that I would be leading this whole thing pretty quick, right? I was sent to the nursery to change diapers for two
years before I had any other job to do in church! It was only after proven faithfulness that I got some heavenly promotions or reassignments. My first sermon in a church was in a church of nine until my family left for children’s church and then there were five!

ii. **Choosing the right people for the right work**

The job description, as we have already said, would require being full of the Holy Spirit (not tongues), wisdom and good standing in the community. It seems a lot of qualification for what we would think to be a small task; however, it may have been a pretty large scale logistics job (Money, wisdom, putting out fires).

The individuals are chosen, there is the list of the seven chosen for the task and they are all Greek names. Some of them will move beyond waiting on tables to preaching and to martyrdom in very short order. They are installed by the laying on of hands. And lastly, they all experience increase!

In the end, good and godly governance produced the right results and it was happily ever after time?

**Conclusion:**

Next time, we will be looking at the very first martyr and his name was Stephen!

Before we finish with today, let’s have one last look at the most important things from today’s teaching.

1. Murmuring is a serious sin and will often become the devilish seed of other things.

2. Murmuring can render a church and specifically the murmurer him or herself, useless.

Guard your own thought life and tongue....

3. There is a right way to get what you want, unless of course what you want is wrong for the church and for you. Always use the legitimate means and system available to us to bring your concerns forward. You will get a listen!