

Southside Worship Online

18 April 2021, Rev. Esteban Liévano

Gathering with God

We pray for those who set tables for the hungry,
Those who apply salve for the weary,
Lord God, bless those who minister in Your Name.
Women and Men, lay and ordained;
Who follow Your call.
Pour our Your blessings on Your people,
As we endeavour to serve the community,
In Your Name,
Amen.

Please go to
<https://livestream.com/ggservices/ssuc> to access our worship service. **Families with children are encouraged to use family faith materials** Ps Richard Moors has made available.

Scripture Reading – Acts 6:1-7:1

Seven Chosen to Serve

¹Now during those days, when the disciples were increasing in number, the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. ²And the twelve called together the whole community of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task, ⁴while we, for our part, will devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word."

⁵What they said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷The 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.

⁸Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. ¹⁰But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit^a with which he spoke. ¹¹Then they secretly instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God."

¹²They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, seized him, and brought him before the council. ¹³They set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; ¹⁴for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us." ¹⁵And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

^{7:1} Then the high priest asked him, "Are these things so?"

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Sermon notes

Stephen and the 7 Deacons

Acts 6:1-7:1

Therefore, friends, select from among yourselves seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may appoint to this task,

Acts 6:3



The icon of St Stephen (seen to the right), is a celebration of the testimony that we read in Acts 6. Stephen is called “full of the Spirit and of wisdom (v.3)... full of grace and power (v.8)...” in this way we meet in Stephen a ‘new’ kind of Christian, different from the apostles who had walked with Jesus – Stephen is an example of the first Christians in the Early Church. For this reason, we see in the icon that Stephen is holding a building – the church.

As the author of Luke-Acts, Luke uses names and places as illustrations to add greater meaning to the text. Stephen’s name is one of these instances and we can find that meaning in 2 Timothy 4:8 where Paul is describing his reward in heaven as στέφανος – *stephanos* and this word means ‘crown.’ Tradition

tells us that Stephen was Jewish-born but yet he is remembered by this Greek name. Some theologians think that it may have been a title that was used in order to protect Stephen’s family or friends from further persecution. What we know is that Stephen is an example for us of the Christian who is willing to wear their faith on their sleeve.

Not only was Stephen a deacon (a term that Paul uses to mean ‘servant’ or ‘minister’) but he also operated in the Spirit to give testimony of Jesus who would change the customs of Moses and bring about an end of the Law (v.14-15). Jewish Law defines these statements as blasphemy, an offence punishable by death – and the Jewish leaders were prepared to carry out this punishment. Stephen would have known this, as the Roman government at Judea would not allow the Jewish leaders jurisdiction over non-Jews. But as a devout Jew who had the revelation of the Holy Spirit, is it any wonder that Stephen was willing to give his life so that God’s message in Christ would be heard.

“Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with human hands; as the prophet says, ‘Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest?... Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers.’” Acts 7:48-52

Stephen is our example because he was not afraid to share a confrontational word about Christ, we must also be prepared to share the Good News of Jesus, even in spaces where it may be uncomfortable – or where we may find ourselves where this message may not have been received well in the past. In this way, we also have a *stephanos* that awaits us, a reward in Christ.