

April 18 2021

Stephen's Witness

Acts 6:1-7:2a, 44-60

Brothers and sisters this is a passage that is saturated with possible topics for a Sunday sermon. I struggled with this one. This is my fourth draft on this passage. I hope and pray that it will be some benefit on your spiritual journey. The topics I chose were bricks and mortar and martyrdom. Both are huge topics but I will try to make them relevant and speak to our lives.

Stephen's accusers lose their minds when he reminds them of what the temple is and its intended purpose. Stephen has a great command of the Old Testament and quotes the prophet Isaiah in Chapter seven verses forty nine and fifty. "Heaven is My throne and earth My footstool. What house will you build for Me? Says the Lord. Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all things?" Seems as though his accusers forgot this passage. Stephen reminds them that God is everywhere and in all things. God is not kept in a box behind a curtain in the temple. Unfortunately, in their minds they have restricted God to a limited space. This only reflects the smallness of their minds and understanding of God. I find it beautiful that it is Isaiah who Stephen quotes. The prophet who saw the Lord coming and the one Jesus quotes the most in the Gospels.

One of Stephen's accusers would write years later in 1 Cor 6:19-20, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which is God's." Paul is saying the same thing Stephen is saying. You and I are the temples of the Holy Spirit. The temple or church is just the place we gather to worship God. Where the Body of Christ gathers. The temple is not the bricks and mortar. It is you and I. We are the bricks and Christ is the mortar.

If more Christians truly realized and internalized this concept, that we are temples of the Holy Spirit it would change everything. Then we would have to live up to the responsibility placed upon us as these temples. We would have no excuses for the things we do and say. When we realize this, then the Kingdom would come in the immediate present. Earth would be transformed to Heaven on earth for all.

We relearned the lesson of the temple in the past year. We had to rethink how we gather all the temples of the Holy Spirit for communal worship. Some did it on line or outside in nature. There is a great concentration of creative energy when we all gather. We call it prayer. It is this energy and power that shapes our society, culture and builds the Kingdom amongst us. I believe that it is this prayerful energy that people missed the most when we couldn't gather.

A martyr is one who sacrifices something for their faith. We hear how Stephen gives up his life and is martyred for his faith. You and I do not have these challenges here in Canada. Yet many Christians in parts of the world certainly do. I think of the Christians in Egypt, Libya, Indonesia and China how struggle with the fear of martyrdom. We are

encouraged to martyr ourselves daily. To pick up our crosses daily and follow Christ to Golgotha. It is there that we are to die to ourselves. That we are to crucify our egos with humility. This is our daily struggle. Luke 9-23, “ Then He said to them all, If anyone desires to come after Me, let them deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Those who have mastered their egos hopefully would share their struggles with others. In this way they become living martyrs and pass their wisdom on to others with similar struggles. This is the sweet science of the soul that we call Christianity. This type of martyrdom is for a lifetime.

This past year has been a great lesson in martyrdom. We have all sacrificed not gathering for the safety of others. We have had to struggle with our egos in many different ways. Thinking for the collective good and safety. It is very hard not doing what you want or following rules that you think are stupid or do not apply to you. It has been a year of martyrdom. I am just saying, do you think God is trying to teach or prepare us for something? God Bless, Pastor D