



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



Full of Grace and Power

Text: Acts 6:8-15

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A little background is in order.

Stephen was chosen, by the apostles, previous to this occasion, to help secure food for widows. He was one of seven men chosen to be the first Deacons in the history of Christianity. But Stephen seemed to take a different approach than they had originally thought. We don't know how many widows he served food to, but we do know that he began preaching and performing signs and wonders. And he did so because he was full of grace and power.

He was filled with the grace of God and had extraordinary power because of this.

But people disagreed with what Stephen had to say.

People were frightened because of what Stephen had to say.

So Stephen got arrested and will soon be stoned to death for performing signs and wonders and telling people about Jesus.

Sometimes I wonder about things.

It is, at times, easy for us to miss the fact or forget the fact that the people we read about in the Bible were real life people who lived and loved and had joys, frustrations, and sorrows like every one of us.

And they were people who tried to do the right thing and, somehow felt that as long as they were honest and did the right thing, things would turn out okay.

And this is probably quite true for Stephen. He was a good man, an honest man, and a sincere man. He felt that he was being obedient to God.

And this good, sincere man who was trying to be obedient to God and he was being accused of all sorts of things, was being lied about, and found himself in jail and will eventually die for his crime which was preaching and performing signs and wonders in Jesus' name.

Many years ago, in Massachusetts, a group of people known as Pilgrims, had the first Thanksgiving meal with the natives of the region. The first meal, we know, included wild turkey and cranberries, items which were indigenous to the region.

The Pilgrims, it turned out, had, objectively speaking, remarkably little to be thankful for. The trip over from England had been brutal. Instead of being in Virginia, where the climate is more pleasant, they were in Massachusetts. And no one lives in Massachusetts because of the climate.

They had been devastated by disease and were living in woeful living conditions. They had remarkably little to be grateful to God for; but they will took time to Worship God and give God thanks.

These were remarkable people. They risked it all to have the freedom to Worship God as they desired. They were willing to give up so much to be free to practice their faith according to their own conscience. When life was difficult for them, they could have chosen resentment and no one would have condemned them for it.

Instead, they chose to be grateful. When given a choice between resentment and gratitude, they chose gratitude.

I find them remarkable. One thing I noticed about myself is that I complain too much about foolish things. When things don't go my way, I become angry, upset, and resentful. All too often, I fail to see the good in situations.

I don't believe I am all that different from many people. I think as a culture we are so comfortable and often so spoiled by all that is around us, we moan and grown when things don't go our way.

We are, when you get right down to it, very spoiled. Most of us, right now, would never give thanks under the circumstances of the Pilgrims.

Perhaps this Thanksgiving, it may be a good time to really ponder that, and pray that we may turn our resentments in life, to gratitude.