

Acting Out: Fueling Up Sunday, 6/24/18

1 This summer, we're working our way through the book of Acts, recapturing the vision and missionary impulse that lit the early church on fire with passion, power, and purpose. Many of you are reading along at home- if you're not, it's not too late for you to start today! Every Christian is called, gifted with and by the Spirit, and sent in mission to act out the love of God. How did you do with last week's challenge? I asked you to think about where you fit into God's big picture and then find at least one way to act out the forgiveness of God, either by taking a step to grow in your love of God or your love of another. Does anyone want to share a way they acted out the gospel this week? {take handheld wireless mic and field some comments?} Throughout this summer we're also taking and posting selfies for Jesus. Part of acting out the Gospel is letting people know. Remember, we're not secret agents for Jesus, we're sacred agents, and sacred agents proclaim the Gospel in deed, word, and yes, even with selfies! If you've tried to post your photos with our special hashtag and failed, try removing the periods and any spaces (BUMCactingout). You can then click on the hashtag and it will display everyone else's "Acting Out" photos as well!

2 Have you ever played chicken with the gas gauge of your car? Jana and I first met in Blacksburg, Virginia, a little town nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Anything beyond a cheeseburger or a beer required a long drive up and down steep mountain grades to Roanoke, with no gas stations in between. I'm not sure if it was because we were young and more inclined to take risks or that we just forgot to fill up, but I can recall many times driving home from Roanoke, anxiously looking at the orange dashboard warning light and watching the gas gauge needle creep toward empty. Have you been there? In four years, we never ran out of gas, but I'm pretty sure we made it on only fumes a few times. I'm also pretty sure we shortened our lives as well as our fingernails from all those gas gauge dramas.

Why do we do that? Why do we push ourselves to the very limit and risk getting stranded on the roadside waiting for help? I don't often play chicken with the gas gauge any more, but I've noticed that I sometimes play chicken with a different kind of fuel. I'm talking about the Holy Spirit, the essential fuel for acting out the gospel. Running low on that fuel has even more catastrophic consequences, for ourselves, for our communities, and

for our mission. Today, we're going to focus on the Holy Spirit, as we rejoin the Apostles of Jesus on the day of Pentecost, in the aftermath of the dramatic pouring out of the Holy Spirit, with the sound of rushing wind and the sight of tongues of fire. I'm continuing in Chapter 2, picking up in verse 32 of the New Living Translation. As you listen to Peter's speech, watch for those three things that I said Acts is all about: God's forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and the mission of sharing both with the world.

{Read Acts 2:32-41 (NLT)}.

3 The Greek word for "spirit" occurs 70 times in Acts, most often in reference to the Holy Spirit. Luke speaks of people being "full of" the Holy Spirit, "filled with" the Holy Spirit, and receiving "the gift" of the Holy Spirit. Clearly, Luke wants us to understand that acting out the Gospel is impossible if we haven't fueled up first with the Holy Spirit. Acting out the Gospel is a cross-country race, and we can't expect to finish it if we're running on fumes. We can fill up our cars at the gas station, we can charge our cell phones just about wherever we go, but how do we top off our tanks with the Holy Spirit?

As a United Methodist, I like to say that "it's all about grace." Before we can even talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit, we have to acknowledge that God's Holy Spirit goes before us and comes alongside us long before we can ever choose to repent, confess our faith in Christ, or do any of the things we normally associate with being filled with the Holy Spirit. It's all about grace, and that's really good news.

If you've come to church today feeling like you're running on empty, unworthy to receive the love of another person, let alone God, then I want you to hear that God's Spirit goes before you, behind you, beneath you, above you, and alongside you, wanting nothing more than to convince you of the deep and wide love that Christ has for you. That empty gas tank doesn't have to remain empty, and there's nothing you can do to make yourself worthy of a fill-up. We call that "prevenient grace," which means grace that comes before us. It's a hallmark of United Methodist Theology, and it's why we baptize infants. There is no age or intellect great enough to bring us on par with the love of God, who generously pours out the Holy Spirit into our lives as a gift.

4 Normally, baptism is the covenant of the Christian Church through which we formally enter into a covenant with God and with each other regarding a deliberate choice to

cooperate with God's Holy Spirit by doing things like living according the Good News of Jesus and finding our active part in the Church, the Body of Christ. Baptism doesn't mean the Holy Spirit wasn't at work in our lives beforehand, but it does ratify a human commitment to partner with the Holy Spirit in living the mission of carrying the Good News to more and more people. You can think of baptism as a formal "inviting in" of the Holy Spirit, from a position of moving alongside us to taking up a new dwelling place within our hearts.

Jesus and Peter made a distinction between the baptisms of John and the baptisms made in the name of Jesus. Before Jesus, people were baptized as a sign that they were going to try harder by making a fresh start in trying to keep the law. Since Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, it's all about grace, and so instead of simply trying harder to behave well, we're invited to let go of trying and surrender our wills to the Holy Spirit, the indwelling presence of God. We still repent, turning away from sin, but now we're turning to God's Holy Spirit, trusting that as we surrender more and more of our lives to God, the Spirit of God will bear more and more good fruit in our lives.

If you're out of gas today, and you haven't been baptized yet, that would be an excellent next step, no matter how old you are. Baptism is a big deal. Jesus did it. Jesus told us to do it. Because we all need the Holy Spirit, not just *with* us, but burning *within* us.

5 If you've already been baptized, then you know that there are still times when you feel as if you're running on empty. Although baptism in the name of Jesus is a once-and-done thing, being filled with the Holy Spirit isn't.

How many of you know that this is the logo for the United Methodist Church? How many of you know that the red flame is a symbol of the Holy Spirit? Good! Notice that the cross is empty. We follow the risen Christ! But we do so under the leadership and power of the Holy Spirit, not just on Pentecost, but on every day.

We look to the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin, to convince us of the truth of the Gospel, to teach us and help us to read the Bible, to comfort us in times of struggle, to bind the Church together in unity, to call us into our vocations, to inspire prophetic words, to equip us for ministry, to intercede on our behalf with the Father, and to send us out into mission. There is no United Methodist Church without the atoning work of Christ on the

Cross, there is no United Methodist Church without the Holy Spirit, and there is no United Methodist Church without the mission of bringing the Good News to more and more people. Sound familiar? It's all about the forgiving love of God, the empowering call of the Holy Spirit, and acting out the Gospel in mission.

6 If you're in need of a Holy Spirit fill-up this week, and I suspect most of us are, try acting out some of these time-honored ways to get refilled with the spirit: 1) Pray that God will open the Scriptures to your mind and heart; 2) Read the Word of God, perhaps especially the book of Acts; 3) Ask God to reveal to you any behaviors or attitudes that you need to turn away from or turn toward; 4) Confess that you're powerless to do so on your own; 5) Determine to surrender your life afresh to God's Spirit (read my article on the cover of the July newsletter for more on prayerful surrender); 6) Ask God to fill you to overflowing with the Holy Spirit; 7) Set aside some time every day to be still and listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit; and 8) When the Spirit moves you to act out the Gospel, don't hide it under a rock! Take a selfie for Jesus, or at the very least, tell someone else as an encouragement to them.

I close now with an excerpt from Ted Loder's Poem, Turn Your Spirit Loose:

Turn your Spirit Loose, O God, turn your Spirit loose now, and me with it, that I may go to where the edge is, to face with you the shape of my mortality: the inescapable struggle and loneliness and pain which remind me that I am less than god after all, that you have made me with hard limits, limits to my strength, my knowledge, my days.

Facing those limits, Lord, grant me grace to live to the limit of being unflinchingly alive, irrepressibly alive, fully alive, of experiencing every fragile, miraculous, ... aching, beautiful ounce of being a human being; of doing my duty and a little more; of loving the people around me, my friends and my enemies; of humbling myself to take others seriously and delightedly; of applying my heart to the wisdom of simplicity, the freedom of honesty.¹

May we all go with God "to where the edge is," living far beyond what we can do on our own, discovering a new joy and freedom that comes when we surrender the control of our lives to God and unleash the Holy Spirit to blow where the Holy Spirit will blow. Amen.

¹ Loder, Ted. *Guerrillas of Grace* (p. 112)



Buffalo United Methodist Church



...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!

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