

## **Acting Out: Doing a 180** Sunday, 7/15/18

**1** We're continuing our journey through the book of Acts, recapturing the vision and missionary impulse that lit the early church on fire with passion, power, and purpose. Acts is all about God's forgiveness, the Holy Spirit, and the mission of sharing both with the world. Remember that we're not secret agents for Jesus, we're what? Sacred agents! And sacred agents proclaim the Gospel in deed, word, and even with the crazy "Acting Out" pictures we're still taking out in the lobby. Last week I challenged you to find a way to step out of your comfort zone- to reach "escape velocity" from the familiar for the sake of sharing the love of Jesus with someone else. Who has something they'd like to share about stepping out of their comfort zone for the sake of someone else? {carry portable mic to pews}.

**2** All of us have tried to change our own behavior at one time or another in our lives. Whether it's weight loss, breaking free from an addiction, starting an exercise program, or giving up a bad habit, we've all tried to add or subtract something from our lives to varying degrees of success. Think about something you've tried or at least desired to add to your life or give up. It doesn't matter how big or how small a thing it is. Now turn to a neighbor and share with them for about a minute. {Allow a minute or so for sharing}

Sometimes what we try to change in our lives is a relatively modest thing, like adding vegetables to our daily meal plan. Other times we try something more drastic, like going cold turkey on cigarettes, alcohol, or processed sugar. There are as many opinions on the right way to change behavior as there are people in this world, but if we really do hope to act out God's love in this world in Spirit-filled and powerful ways, there are times when nothing less than a complete turn-around will do. The story of Saul's turn-around ranks as one of the most significant and extreme accounts of Christian conversion in recorded history. The dramatic changes in Saul's life remain a powerful testimony to the reality of God's forgiveness and the power of God's Holy Spirit. The story of Saul's great reversal began on the road to Damascus, but it didn't end there. Let's continue the story of Saul's conversion as he waits in Damascus, blind and fasting from food and water. I'm picking up now in verse 10 of chapter 9.

**{Read Acts 9:10-22 (NLT)}.**

**3** I'm not sure if Acts 9 is the origin of the expression, "I see the light," but it sure is a good example! Saul wasn't the kind of person who was likely to respond to that still, quiet voice of God gently prodding him in one direction or another. Saul was on a murderous rampage, purportedly in the name of God, going house to house arresting Christians, most likely those same Christians most closely associated with Philip and the now martyred Stephen. It took something dramatic to halt Saul's energetic, downright zealous vector of persecution. Saul's is the only Biblical encounter with Jesus after his ascension to the right hand of the Father. It's therefore meant to carry the force of a bright yellow highlighter and a bold eighty-point type face in our reading of Luke-Acts: Something important is happening here that will inform everything else that you, a fellow follower of Jesus, will read and do.

Saul's encounter with Jesus was unique, because his problem and position were unique. Saul was single-handedly doing more to damage the budding Christian Church than anyone else within 1,000 miles of Jerusalem, including the occupying Roman army. I hope none of us ever has the burden of that kind of extreme distinction added to our biography. We all do and say things that are antagonistic to bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. Part of maturing in our faith is recognizing those things, turning away from them, and then walking down a new road. Repentance isn't just seeing the light of Jesus. It's not just turning around either. Imagine how forgettable Saul's story would have been if he had been baptized, preached at a few churches, and then went back to arresting Christians. Doing a 180 for Jesus means turning and then leaning into that new direction, as committed, or even more committed, to acting out the love of Jesus as we were to chasing the wrong behavior that led to our falling down, blind and helpless, in the middle of the road.

If you had to name to yourself and your savior one thing that you most urgently need to turn from, do you know what that would be? Don't worry. I'm not going to ask you to share that with your neighbor in the pews, so be honest with yourself and with God. If you had to name to yourself and your savior one thing that you most urgently need to turn from, what would it be? And if it's something you've turned away from before, what is it going to take to keep you committed to that 180 the next time you turn?

**4** I've asked John Hagen to share his own story of doing a 180 for Jesus. Listen with your heart and see if God might be nudging you to take your own turn-around. {John Hagen, 3-4 minute testimony}

**5** We don't know much about the three days Saul sat in the darkness of his blindness, only that he had nothing to eat or drink while he waited for Ananias to arrive, lay hands on him, and baptize him. In a way, Saul was experiencing what Jesus did, three days of darkness in the tomb. I wonder what he was thinking? I wonder what he might have been praying? We'll never know. What we do know is that three days later his sight was restored, he got up, was baptized, broke his fast, and set off down a new road, preaching the Good News of the forgiveness of God in the name of Jesus. And the world has never been the same since.

I wonder if some of us need the gift of blindness to stop us in our tracks. Some of us here today might be marching along a path of destruction that's hurting others, hurting ourselves, and taking us in the opposite direction from God's leading. Is that you today? Is it really going to take three days in the tomb before you're convinced of the power of God? Are you really going to wait until God blinds you with the divine glory before you face your desperate need to make a change, and your complete inability to make that change apart from the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit?

Your challenge this week is to identify and take the first step in turning away from something that is coming between you and acting out the Gospel. It doesn't have to be as world-changing as Saul's conversion was. It doesn't even have to be complete. First, you'll have to be able to see what it is God would have you turn away from. God will help you see what needs to be turned around in your life if you'll simply slow down, ask, and listen. Read the Bible, pray about it. It's a prayer that God loves to answer. The actual turning around? The AA program has that exactly right- "a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God."<sup>1</sup> Every step after that comes one day at a time.

Change is hard, but travelling down the wrong road is even harder. If each of us did a 180 for Jesus, imagine what this world might look like!

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.projectknow.com/research/alcoholics-anonymous-12-step/>



# *Buffalo United Methodist Church*



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

**609 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW  
Buffalo, MN 55313  
763-682-3538**

**Bill Reinhart, Pastor**  
*pastorbill@buffaloumc.com*