

# **"Act as a Witness"**

**ACT UP - Small Group Campaign Fall 2017**

**November 12, 2017**

**North East United Methodist Church**

**Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

*23 When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. 24 Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. 25 And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, 26 saying,*

*'Go to this people and say,  
"You will keep on hearing, but will not understand;  
And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;  
27 For the heart of this people has become dull,  
And with their ears they scarcely hear,  
And they have closed their eyes;  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
And hear with their ears,  
And understand with their heart and return,  
And I would heal them.'"*

*28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." 29 [When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.]*

*30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.*

-Acts 28:23-31

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Millions of surveys indicate that approximately 98 percent of Christians do not regularly introduce others to the Savior.

A survey was given to those attending training sessions for the Billy Graham crusade in Detroit. One question asked, "*What is your greatest hindrance in witnessing?*" 9% said they were too busy to remember to do it. 28% felt the lack of real information to share. None said they didn't really care. 12% said their own lives were not speaking as they should. But by far the largest group were the 51% whose biggest problem was the fear of how the other person would react!

Lieghton Ford tells the following story...

*I was speaking at an open-air crusade in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Billy Graham was to speak the next night and had arrived a day early. He came incognito and sat on the grass at the rear of the crowd. Because he was wearing a hat and dark glasses, no one recognized him.*

*Directly in front of him sat an elderly gentleman who seemed to be listening intently to my presentation. When I invited people to come forward as an open sign of commitment, Billy decided to do a little personal evangelism. He tapped the man on the shoulder and asked, "Would you like to accept Christ? I'll be glad to walk down with you if you want to." The old man looked him up and down, thought it over for a moment, and then said, "Naw, I think I'll just wait till the big gun comes tomorrow night."*

*Billy and I have had several good chuckles over that incident. Unfortunately, it underlines how, in the minds of many people, evangelism is the task of the "Big Guns," not the "little shots."*

You and I...us "*little shots*"...are called to ACT as a WITNESS...in fact, studies have shown that 96% of unchurched people are likely to attend church if someone would invite them...

...but we must also remember witnessing is not just done with our words...

A WITNESS is someone who by explanation and demonstration gives audible and visible evidence of what he has seen and heard without being deterred by the consequences of his action.

Research shows that the unchurched want to hear about God, they want to make a difference, they want deep, real relationships with Christian men and women, they want their children to know God and be part of a church that is making a difference...

They are looking for a people and a church who WITNESS to their faith and the power of God through both their words and actions...

Throughout our study on the book of Acts, everything has led to this final moment...this final message...to our mission...

Matthew 28:19-20 - "***Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.***"

We are to GO...

\***Acting with POWER** for if we have accepted Christ we have received the Holy Spirit...God goes with us, empowers us, gives us the words to speak...

\***Acting with GENEROSITY** using our gifts to build up God's Church...to build up others...and to point people to a Savior...

\***Acting with ACCEPTANCE** so the people we meet will see acceptance and welcome in our eyes, an understanding that God loves everyone including them...

\***Acting with CREATIVITY**, setting aside our personal preferences for the sake of the Gospel and being open to God doing "*a new thing*" in our lives and the life of His Church...

\***Acting with PERSEVERANCE**, knowing that God is on the throne and therefore we do not need to be afraid...we can trust Him...

\***Acting with COURAGE** for God has not given us "*a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power...*"

We are to GO...**Acting as a WITNESS** to the Gospel and love of Jesus Christ in a world that is desperately hurting, divided, and lost...

Paul is willing to GO...is willing to be a witness to the gospel even under difficult circumstances. He refuses to be intimidated by the many "*authorities*" who put him on trial.

In this week's readings, we find charges being brought against Paul by the Jewish leaders. He is put on trial before the Governor of Judea, Felix.



Governor Felix listens to Paul's defense but refuses to release Paul in order to gain favor with the Jewish leaders. Paul stays imprisoned for two years until Governor Festus is appointed by Emperor Nero to take over responsibilities in Judea.

Governor Festus listens to Paul's defense and, wanting to please the Jews, suggests Paul be tried in Jerusalem. Paul objects to being turned over to a biased court intent on murder and not justice; therefore, Paul, a Roman citizen, appeals to Caesar.



Even the Jewish leader Agrippa, King of Palestine, after arriving to pay respects to Governor Festus and hearing Paul's testimony, his faith, believes Paul has "*done nothing deserving death*". But Paul has appealed to Caesar so Governor Festus sends him to Rome in the late fall of A.D. 59.

In Chapter 27 of Acts, Paul and several other prisoners in the care of a Captain of the Imperial Regiment, Julius, set sail for Rome.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul still Acting as a Witness, still sharing the story of Jesus...reaching out to all who would listen with Power, Generosity, Acceptance, Creativity, Perseverance, and Courage...

Acts 28:23-31 -

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***Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."***

***And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.***

The Book of Acts ends with Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God to the Jews in Rome, arguing from the Old Testament and the prophets that Jesus is the Messiah whose coming was foretold.

There is a mixed response as some believe and some refuse. Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah...because some have hardened their hearts to hearing God's Word the message of salvation will be taken to the Gentiles as well.

Under house arrest...



...Paul remains in Rome for two years, continuing to share with anyone who would listen about Jesus...

Once D.L. Moody was walking down a Chicago street when he saw a man leaning against a lamppost. The evangelist gently put his hand on the man's shoulder and asked him if he was a Christian. The fellow raised his fists and angrily exclaimed, "*Mind your own business!*"

"*I'm sorry if I've offended you,*" said Moody, "*but to be very frank, that IS my business!*"

Paul never forgot what his business, his mission, was...He describes himself, "*Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God*"...

Paul understood what Scott Wilson writes, "*The normal Christian life is to realize that the place that God has put is is part of his sovereign plan to take the love of Jesus to our Jerusalem, our Judea and Samaria, and to everyone who will listen.*"

You and I have...North East UMC has...a mission.



We have been given a common mission and are called by Christ to be united in this mission. Jesus prayed that we would be “*one*” in our mission, reaching out to those around us who are lost, who do not know that they are loved.

As Paul said, in Acts 20:24 (NKJV), “***But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.***” The Message reads, “*The most important thing is that I complete my mission, the work that the Lord Jesus gave me.*”

Paul never forgot what his business was and he never allowed fear to hold him back from completing his business...fulfilling his mission...from sharing the love of Christ...

Lieghton Ford explains that when he senses the fear of failure holding him back from acting as a WITNESS, he goes through a personal checklist:

- 1. Does my fear come from pride, a fear that I will not live up to my own expectations or to those of others? That I will be rejected?**

2. **Do I remember that God has called me first to faithfulness, then to efficiency? That I am called to be faithful not successful.**
  
3. **Do I trust that the Holy Spirit is working before me, with me, and through me...and that God can do His greatest work when I seem to be weakest...when I give the Holy Spirit control?**

Will we ACT AS A WITNESS?

You have a unique role to play in His Story. You have...

- (1) A Testimony...A Story...how you began a relationship with Jesus and how that relationship has impacted your life
- (2) Life Lessons, Experiences, and Trials...Through these life moments God has taught you many things & you have experienced God personally as He has walked with you
- (3) Godly Passions...issues you have come to care about...issues God has laid on your heart
- (4) God-Given Gifts & Talents to be used in ministry and mission to make a difference, to reach others
- (5) Knowledge of the Good News about Jesus

You have all this to share in ways that no one else can share. God has placed people all around you, within your sphere of influence...within our church's sphere of influence...who need connection, love, compassion, forgiveness...who need someone to talk to who has been through some of what they are dealing with...who simply need Christ. For some of these people, you will be the difference...you will be the one God uses to open the door to a relationship with Him.

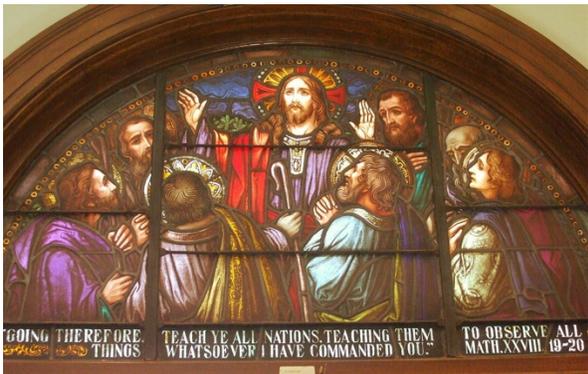
**Matthew 9:35-37 (NKJV) - “*Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like***

***sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few.”***



Jesus looked at the crowds following him...referred to them as ripe for harvest. Bill Hybels writes, *“Jesus’ stories tell us that you never looked eyes with another human being who isn’t valuable to God.”*

Jesus looked out and saw this harvest...people who were ready to open themselves up to God’s love.



But there was no one to tell them, no one willing to share, to witness, to give...to sacrifice and in their sacrifice show them Christ. Someone once said, *“Christianity is only one generation away from becoming extinct” – “A church that does not evangelize will fossilize”*

Who will you tell?  
Who will you invite?  
How will you step out, be a witness, in your community?  
How will you speak, share, and live the love of Jesus Christ?

Over the last seven weeks we have traveled with Peter, Paul, and the other disciples...we have witnessed the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost...experienced Paul's miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus...followed the disciples in their moment as they traveled throughout the land sharing the message of Jesus Christ to both Jews and Gentiles...We have witnessed the moment the early church was birthed...

Like the disciples in the book of Acts, you and I, this congregation, each of you whether you are new or have traveled with this church family for generations, have been placed here for this moment. The past is behind us...the future is unknown...but this moment...this moment is our moment...

- (1) This is our moment to COMMIT...to commit our lives to God, trusting in Him, in the Holy Spirit for power and strength...to commit to acting as a witness in both our words and deeds...allowing North East UMC to become a place where people aren't able to stay away because the light of Christ draws them here...a place where the visitor is embraced and looks forward to returning because they have witnessed the love of Christ in us...
- (2) This is our moment to GROW...to immerse ourselves in small groups, in the scriptures, in prayer...to join with other in studying God's Word and applying it to our lives...to become more like Christ in the days ahead...
- (3) This is our moment to SERVE...to use our gifts to serve in ministry and mission in the church...to make a difference within these walls and beyond, reaching out to those in our community and around our world who are hurting...

Our Church's Mission Statement:

***The North East United Methodist Church,  
through our personal COMMITment to Jesus Christ,  
is striving to be a GROWing and vital congregation  
actively SERVing God, the community, and one another.***

This is our moment to COMMIT, GROW, and SERVE...

This is our moment to ACT with POWER and GENEROSITY...with ACCEPTANCE and CREATIVITY...with PERSEVERANCE and COURAGE...this is our moment to have our lives, our church, be a WITNESS to the world...

This is our moment...like Paul...to "*...press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called [us] heavenward in Christ Jesus.*"

Let us live into this moment with faith and trust in the One who goes before us...let us live into this moment together "*preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ [through our words and actions] with all openness, unhindered [and unafraid].*"

Let us ACT UP together.