

Don't just sit on it. Act on it!

Message for Sunday, March 8, 2015
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Acts 2:38-47

Children's Message: from Matthew 22:34-40

I'm going to show you something today I've never told anyone about — ever! This is my magic wand. I can do all kinds of wonderful things with it.

For instance, I'm going to wave my magic wand and make this building disappear. Just like that! Pretty neat, eh? We're all sitting outside. Ooh, it's a bit chilly. I'll wave it again and — ah, that's better: it's a nice summer day, and we're sitting on the grass under the shade of a tree.

Our project for today is to build a church. No, not another building! The church isn't a building; the church is a group of people who follow Jesus, and who do God's work together.

So let's see what we're going to need to build a church:

- We need to worship God. That's important, and that's just what we've been doing this morning. This Valentine for God is a way to show that.
- We love other people. This picture of one boy helping another boy who fell down is a way to show that. How have you done that recently?
- We tell others the good news about Jesus, like when you invite someone to come to church with you. This invitation card is a way to show that.
- We learn about God, and grow to be more like Jesus. That's what we have the Bible for. We also do that on Sundays.
- We enjoy being together, like Friday night for supper and games. This party hat is a way to show that.

Looks like we're well on our way to building the church!

Sermon "Don't just sit on it. Act on it!"

We're reading through the *Acts of the Apostles*, discovering what the Church was like in the beginning, and how we can make it better today.

This passage comes at the end of chapter 2. Last week we read the first part of chapter 2, where it begins to tell what happened on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples received the Holy Spirit, and the church was really born. Listen for all the action words in this description:

Acts 2:42-47, New Living Translation: "They joined with the other believers and devoted themselves to

the apostles' teaching and fellowship, sharing in the Lord's Supper and in prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity — all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved."

We can sum it up in two ways: they loved God, and they loved one another. Their love was real — they acted on it, instead of just sitting on it. Their neighbours and friends could see this, could see the difference it made in their lives, and so many of them joined as well.

Those are still the key things we need in the church today:

- to experience God's love, and to love God back
- to experience love from others in the church, and to pass that love to others.

Barna Research is a company that does surveys and opinion polls. They have done numerous surveys of people both inside and outside the church, and have found one thing over and over again:

People join churches more because they want warmth than light. Preachers might like to think it's their stunning sermons that keep people in the pews. Actually, that has little to do with it. Most people start coming to church because a friend invited them. Most people keep coming to church because they made friends.
[Quoted by Jack R. Van Ens in *Leadership* magazine.]

Nicky Gumbel, the speaker in the *Alpha* course, tells what happened one Sunday morning in a church in Warnsworth, England. Roger Stevenson is the pastor of this church of about 200 people. The building was built so that the worshippers gathered on the main floor. The second floor was occupied by offices, connected by a hallway that overlooked the worship area, sort of an enclosed balcony.

They were having a baptism that Sunday, and there were a number of visitors present. The worship service had begun, when Roger noticed something unusual going on. He happened to look up at the second floor, and saw the

hall was filled with heavily armed police officers, wearing bulletproof vests. He sent one of his staff, a man named Paul, upstairs to see what was going on.

Paul returned in a couple of minutes and reported, “We’re in serious trouble. A man has just shot someone, the police have sealed off the whole area, and the suspect is here in the church service.”

They couldn’t very well let the service continue, yet they couldn’t just stop the service, for fear the man would take hostages. The police had suggested that they walk inconspicuously (!) up and down the aisles of the church until they think they’ve spotted the suspect, and then tell everyone to freeze while they make their arrest. Roger didn’t think that would work very well.

So he announced, “If you are a regular member of the congregation, please come forward and gather around the baptistry. And if you came as a guest of someone who is a regular member of the congregation, please also come forward and gather around the baptistry.”

This worked wonderfully well. The entire church got up as one body and moved to the front, leaving one man sitting all alone in the middle of a pew. The police moved in swiftly. They arrested the man, handcuffed him and hauled him off. Everyone heaved a great sigh of relief.

The only problem was, they got completely the wrong person! This man had come to the church because he had heard about the love and forgiveness he could receive at this particular church! He heard that relationships were healed and bodies were mended. He had come looking for God.

What do people find when they come to St. Paul’s Church? What do *you* find?

Remember the list of actions in the Bible passage? Of the things that characterized the Church in Acts, which ones do you recognize happening here?

- ✓ What do we do well as a church? Put a check by those ones.
- * Where do we need to improve? Put a star by those ones.
- ! Which ones are part of your dream for St. Paul’s Church? Put an exclamation mark by those ones.

Perhaps there are things that aren’t even mentioned here that are very special to you in a church. Write those in as well.

... *allow time for this...*

In that exercise, it’s quite natural for people to think, “I wish our church was more...”, or “I wish they would...” In other words, it’s up to someone else to do something to make things better.

But here’s another question, just as important as what you find at St. Paul’s: What do you *bring* to St. Paul’s Church? How can *you* be part of making a difference in this church?

- Do you bring a spirit of anticipation? Are you thirsty for God?
- Do you bring an openness to fellowship? Do other people see you as approachable, or more like a brick wall?
- What are your gifts and talents? Do you bring them, offering them for use in Christ’s service?

Maybe you’ve never thought about this. Take a moment now, and ask yourself, “What do I bring to St. Paul’s Church?”

... *allow time for this...*

Next Steps:

- Celebrate the good things that are happening in St. Paul’s Church. Tell others, invite them to come and see for themselves.
- How can we improve?
 - * Do your part to make things even better
 - * Offer positive suggestions to church leaders
 - * Pray for our church, that we will be faithful in all we do
- Homework: Read Acts 3 in preparation for next Sunday.