

WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY  
Acts 9.19-31

How many of you have been following the football play-offs?  
It's been exciting for most part, particularly with the Vikings in the play-offs.

I hope some of you video yourselves watching the game  
or tape your colorful play by play commentary.  
I'm sure that would be most entertaining,  
maybe even more entertaining than the game.

Anyway we know that one of the things  
that often determines the outcome of the game is momentum.  
And the momentum is often determine by defining moments,  
sometimes called, windows of opportunities.

In football a window of opportunity would be like,  
being in the red zone or having good field position,  
getting fumble recoveries or interceptions,  
or getting good run backs on punts or kickoffs.

If a team doesn't capitalize on those opportunities,  
the opportunity is lost and perhaps the game as well.

Windows of opportunity are  
crucial and critical in the game of life too.

Those are the chances to get ahead,  
to find meaning and purpose in life,  
to invest in relationships  
or even to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ  
who want to serve him willingly and well.

This last couple of weeks Char and I had some time  
to get to know our new little granddaughter, Evie.

We were going to share that time.  
The operative word is "share."  
You know we were going to share the time  
we had to hold her, rock her, change her, and etc.

We shared alright.  
Char held her 95% of the time,  
rocked her 98% of the time,  
and I don't remember getting to change her at all.

She capitalized a few more windows of opportunity than I did.

As we look at our scripture today we see and hear  
that the early church had this great momentum going.

It was growing by leaps and bounds.

That growth was driven by  
the strength and encouragement of the Holy Spirit  
and, by their fear of God.

By God's power this community of faith was able to take and turn  
every window of opportunity into a plus for the Kingdom of God.

Whether the circumstances they found themselves in  
were full of risk,  
froth with danger,  
or had a plethora of trouble...

Anything that was a threat,  
a threat to their lives,  
a threat to their families,  
or especially a threat to their faith,  
they used as an opportunity to either share the gospel  
or support those who did.

Let's rewind to the end of chapter seven in Acts.  
Saul who becomes Paul is watching Stephen's stoning.

Talk about a window of opportunity. Stephen WITNESSES!!!  
He looks at the Sanhedrin and lays out the story of salvation.  
He looks to heaven and sees Jesus.

And **“As the rocks rained down, Stephen prayed,  
'Master Jesus, take my life.'  
Then he knelt down and prayed loud enough for everyone to hear,  
'Master, don't blame them for this sin'-his last words.  
Then he died.  
Saul was right there congratulating the killers.”** Acts 7.59-60 MSG

At some point I have to believe that Saul rethought the value of that moment.

Now forward to Chapter 9.  
Last week Pastor Eldon talked about Saul and Ananias.  
Ananias was given an opportunity to be used by God.

Ananias had the opportunity to help a man full of hatred become holy,  
a man who was an enemy of God become a friend of God,  
a man separated from God, become reconciled to God.

And he made good on that opportunity-though a bit reluctant at first.  
Ananias met with Saul, laid his hands on Saul,  
and prayed for Saul, and Saul saw the light.

Saul saw the light, embraced the light, and then wanted to share the light.

The Bible tells us that Saul became “an instrument of God to carry God’s name to the Gentiles, their kings, and the people of Israel.”

We find that Saul was master at taking advantage of windows of opportunity.  
Acts 9.20, **“At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.”**

The initial response to him, Acts 9.21,

**“All those who heard him were astonished (caught off guard) and asked, (not really believing)**

**“Isn’t this the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name. And hasn’t he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests.”**

Saul kept the window open, in fact he opened it wider.

Acts 9.22, **“Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.”**

And the consequences of his preaching...

Acts 9.23, **“After many days had gone by the Jews conspired to kill him,”**

Hummm, I wonder why?

Actually it isn’t too hard to figure out.

Saul was once on their side,  
even a teacher of the Jewish faith.

Now Saul is a Christian and therefore a traitor to the Jews.

And what do you do with traitors?

You shut them up.

You kill them.

Acts 9.24-25, **“but Saul learned of their plan.**

**Day and night they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him.**

**But his followers took him by night**

**and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall.”**

Don’t you love it?

There is an opening in the wall, a window in the wall.

Ah, the followers, his friends in faith, they see with the eyes of faith.

They literally had a window of opportunity  
and they took it.

They let him down the wall and got him out of town.

Saul heads for Jerusalem.

As one window shuts, another opens up.

Acts 9.26, **“When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple.”**

Isn't his amazing, Saul is between a rock and a hard place.  
The Jews hate him and the Christians are afraid of him,  
both for good reason.

Remember Saul was the Osama Ben Laden of his day.  
He enjoyed, literally enjoyed beating and bloodying,  
purging and persecuting, torturing and tormenting Christians.

What would we do if Osama Ben Laden became a Christian?  
What if he showed up here at FUMC today, even just to worship with us?

Would we believe he'd become a Christian?  
Would we be angry? Afraid?  
Would we embrace him as a brother in Christ?

Ah, a man named Barnabas sees a window of opportunity.

Acts 9.27, **“But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus.**

Saul stays preoccupied with finding opportunities to preach.  
**“So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with Grecian Jews, but they tried to kill him.”**

Help is on the way.  
**“When the brothers learned of this, they took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.”**

Isn't that great.  
Another window of opportunity.  
The people in the church step up to help a brother.

Saul couldn't have done all that he did  
without the strength and encouragement of the Spirit  
and the prayers, provision, and protection of the community of faith.

And neither could we.  
That is the genius of God...  
that we are in community to support, care, and share with one another.

Ken and Elaine Jacobs were two people,

strengthened and encouraged by the Spirit of God  
who saw a window of opportunity in Mexico.

God called them to translated the Gospel, the “Good New Words”  
into the language of the Chamula people of the southern Mexico.

Their story is chronicled in  
“These Words Changed The World” by David Aeilts(Aisles).

It is unbelievable with they had to overcome.  
But page after page tells of them finding windows of opportunity  
to share the “Good New Words.”

The “Good New Words” transformed a community of Chamula Indians,  
a pagan but proud people,  
a people filled with hostility and hatred for those of the Christian faith,  
a people with absolutely not one believer to start with,  
a people transformed into a vibrant community of 150,000 people of faith.

OK, so maybe you’re thinking I’m going to tell you  
that you have to be a Stephen or a Saul, an Ananias or a Barnabas;  
or maybe you’re thinking your window of opportunity has to be in Mexico.

No, not necessarily.  
Instead of Mexico, your window of opportunity could be in Haiti this fall.  
FUMC plans to send some work teams to help with the recovery effort  
in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake last week.

Another window of opportunity.  
Right now the Senior Meal Program needs volunteers  
to put food on the plates of their clients.

Check out the Worship Folder today.  
There are plenty of windows of opportunity.

Take and decorate a Lenten Cross.  
It is an opportunity to think about and express your faith.

Find out more about how to think about your faith,  
check out the Truth Project.

You could join the ACTS prayer team.  
Or you could put together health kits for Haiti.

There are countless “windows of opportunity” for you.  
Some of those opportunities we can pray about and prepare for,  
others are just there.  
And sometimes what we say or do,

we never know the impact or influence that it might have on others.

Many of you know just before Christmas we experienced the death of Kirstin, our one year old grandniece.

At the prayer service for Kirstin her great grandfather Dwayne spoke. Now you have to understand, Dwayne is a great guy and has a huge heart for people. and he seldom asks for anything himself and even more seldom initiates any conversation.

So, to get up in front of all these people and say something, that just "ain't" going to happen, except that it did.

At the end of the service, he stands up in the midst of 165 people and says, You know Kirstin's favorite song was "Jesus Loves Me." And you know I don't sing so good, But I'm going to sing "Jesus Loves Me," and If you want, would you to sing with me?

God provides many, many, many "windows of opportunity" in which we can care and share with others, and which give us the opportunities to grow as devoted followers of Jesus Christ who want to serve him willingly and well.

And now here is an opportunity for you to renew your faith and commitment. Please stand if you are able and let's sing the prayer, "Take My Life."

