

“Be An Act-er,” September 20, 2009

A woman by the name of Barbara Glanz tells about being hired by a large supermarket chain to lead a customer service program designed to build customer loyalty. During her talk, she told the employees, “Every one of you can make a difference and create memories for your customers, and motivate them to come back. Put your personal signature on the job. Think about something you can do for your customers to make them feel special—a memory that will make them come back.”

I wonder if Ms Glanz had read the Bible passage we have for this morning, because what she said sounds very similar to it. This is what Paul writes to the people in the church in Corinth: “There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them. There are different ways of serving, but the same God is served. There are different abilities to perform service, but the same God gives ability to everyone for their particular service. The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.”

Obviously, Paul’s intent was not for his readers to create more loyal customers, or to do their jobs better, at least that wasn’t his sole intent. What he wanted them (and us) to understand is that God gives each of us skills and abilities that are to be used for the good of everyone. That’s really our mission while we’re here—to help others in whatever way we can, and to make a difference in the world, to improve life for everyone.

Paul wants us to understand that the things I can do to help are not the same as what you can do. We’re all different, and we have different gifts and skills, but they’re all from God for the purpose of benefitting others. That’s really what the last sentence says, “The Spirit’s presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all.”

I’m not sure we’re all convinced that that’s what we’re to be doing, because sometimes we’re rather passive when it comes to life. It’s as though we’re watching things from afar, not really invested, not really caring. It’s like the saying that goes, “Some people make things happen, some watch things happen, while others wonder what has happened.” I fear many of us fall in the watching and wondering category.

However, I don’t believe that’s the way it’s supposed to be. We’re here to act, and to act in loving ways! We’re challenged to be an “act-er,” one who makes things happen, who does something to better the world around us.

Barbara Glanz, the grocery store speaker, told about something that happened after she worked with the employees of that grocery store. Perhaps you’ve heard her story. She said that about a month after she was there, she received a call from a 19-year-old bagger by the name of Johnny. She said that he proudly informed her that he was an individual with Down syndrome, and then shared his story with her.

Johnny told her that he liked what she had said, but at first he wasn’t sure he could do anything special for their customers. “After all,” he said, “I’m just a bagger.” However, he got an idea of something he could do.

He said that every night after work, he comes home and finds a thought for the day. If he doesn’t find one he likes, then he’d make one up. His dad then helps him print multiple copies of the quote or thought he has chosen. Johnny then cuts out each quote and signs his name on the back. Johnny takes the quotes to work each day, and puts them in the bags he fills for his customers. His final words to the shoppers are always, “Thanks for shopping with us.”

Apparently Johnny’s efforts really made a difference with the store’s customers, because her next phone call came from the store manager. He told her that as he was making his rounds one day, he had discovered that Johnny’s checkout line was three times longer than anyone else’s! He said he quickly called more cashiers to the front, and asked them to open more lanes. Then he tried to get people to change lines, but no one would budge! Instead, they told the manager, “It’s okay. We want to be in Johnny’s lane; we want his ‘Thought for the day.’”

It turned out that there was something really contagious about Johnny’s effort, and similar things started happening all around the store. If a broken flower or unused corsage was found in the florist department, the floral clerk was putting it on an elderly woman or a little girl to wear. The manager told Glanz, “Everyone’s having a lot of fun creating memories.”

Yes, they were creating positive memories for their customers because they were more aware and more intent on determining what little things they could do that

could make a difference in someone's life, even for just a little while. We're not talking about the kind of thing that makes headlines, but just the little things that may take some time, thought and effort, but that reap immeasurable return in goodwill, and the overall happiness of the people they serve.

Johnny and the employees of that market are not the only ones who can do something like that. Each one of us can do at least one thing that makes the world a little better and someone's day a little brighter. The question we have to ask ourselves is, "What can we do?"

You see, it really doesn't matter where we are or what we do, every single one of us can make a difference in this world, just by the little things we do or say. Consider, for instance, a Garden tech team member who makes it a habit to post a positive, uplifting quote on Facebook every day. I always look forward to reading his words of inspiration each day.

Or take the actions of two Purdue students (and you know it breaks my heart to have to say they're from Purdue!) Last spring, those two young men were downtown on the circle passing out compliments, finding something positive to say to those who were passing by. The last I heard, they had returned to West Lafayette for school, after passing out compliments all over the United States.

That's just a little thing, but they were making the days just a little bit better for those they encountered. That's something we can do on a daily basis, you and I, and when we do, we're heeding something that Anne Frank said, "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." We can all start right this very minute to brighten our corner of the world.

If you're looking for ideas, allow me to share some things that others have embarked upon to help someone out, and to make life better. For example, a couple or three years ago, *People* magazine told about a student by the name of Daniel Kent from Carmel, Indiana. It turns out that a few years prior to that article, he was teaching computer skills at a library near his home, when a someone told him about an elderly friend who was wheelchair-bound, and couldn't come to where Daniel was, but who wanted to learn to use the computer.

That caused Daniel to think up some new way to spread the learning. He used some of his savings, bought some equipment and formed a nonprofit called "Senior Connects," to

provide computers and free lessons to seniors. By the time the article was written, he had set up computer labs and classes in some 70 retirement homes. One elderly participant proudly talked about how she is now able to email her family on a daily basis.

I recently saw a feature on the *NBC Nightly News* about something that is going on in Palm Beach County, Florida. Some Boys and Girls Club members had gotten into raising vegetables, and selling their produce at below-market prices to those in need. The news clip said that the area they were serving had 86% of its population under the poverty level, and the recipients of their hard work reported that they were getting twice as much produce as they could get anywhere else. Boys and girls were learning and helping at the same time.

One California mother came up with a unique way to keep kids off the street and to reduce violence in the area where she lived. Rose Espinoza and her husband, Eliasar, moved with their 8-year-old son to LaHabra, California, a small town east of L.A. She said that boys with baseball bats were hanging out on the corner of their street, and they weren't looking for a game. There were threats of drive-by shootings in the area, and this mother began to wonder what they had gotten themselves into. Instead of fleeing, however, she and her family chose a different action; they started a neighborhood watch group, but almost immediately a threatening message was painted on their truck.

Rosie was forced to try another approach. When school started that fall, Rosie turned her two-car garage into a free after-school tutoring headquarters for elementary through high school students. They offered homework help, along with cookies and lemonade. Sixteen kids showed up the first day, so Rosie recruited high school students as tutors to meet the demand.

Her actions transformed that neighborhood. The students who were tutored increased their writing and math scores an average of more than two grade levels, and there was a noticeable drop in crime in the area. Now there are four locations of "Rosie's Garage," serving over 200 children, using donated computers and books. What a difference Rose Espinoza is making in the lives of the kids in the Los Angeles area.

Those are just some examples of how people have discovered their own particular skills and abilities, and have used them to

become act-ers. They aren't just sitting by, watching things happen; They're making things happen.

Now it's up to us. What can we do to make this world a little better? It can be anything, you know? From simply saying "thank you," to holding the door for someone, to tipping generously in a restaurant, to baking cookies for someone who might appreciate them, to calling the checkout clerk by name, to putting a coin in an expired meter, to buying lemonade from a child's stand. The list is endless, but the decision is ours. Now is the time to start. What are we going to do?

Closing:

William James said, "Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does." How true that is! What we do *does* make a difference.

As we leave here this morning, I hope and pray we're ready to act! Let's all be act-ers for good!

Have a great Sunday, and go in peace.
Amen.