

**Not Throwing Away Our Shot!**  
**Acts 5:27-42**  
(The Church is Persistent)

I love any opportunity to bring in a little bit of *Hamilton*. “My Shot” is one of the earlier numbers by Alexander Hamilton, as Hamilton considers his hopes for the future and his disillusionment with the British Empire. Others join in naming their hopes in a Revolution – from economic class elevation to racial justice to simply being among those change-makers. It’s a powerful number, in spite of the interruptions of Aaron Burr, who wants to remind them to keep quiet about these dreams and hopes, for fear of loyalists who might be among them. Yet, the urgency, the hopes, the radical ideals that propel these men forward is inspiring.

***They didn’t want to miss their moment in history — Didn’t want to miss their opportunity to make a difference.***

As we continue in our study of the early church in Acts, we know that they too were steadfast, in spite of the negative voices in their midst. In their worship, in their care for the community, and in their teaching and preaching, they were faithful, they were stubborn. But, this church was more than just stubborn. They were convicted that they stood on the right side of history, that they served the one true Messiah, and that conviction propelled them into ministry. When they were arrested and brought before the high priest, they did not lie, they did not claim the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment, they did not redact the reports about themselves. They stood behind their behavior because they knew they were being faithful. In the passage read earlier by Bill, they say, *“We must obey God rather than any human authority.”*

How many of us are willing to disobey the human authorities around us in order to be faithful? They had seen for themselves the awesome power of Jesus, and they would not be stopped. **THEY WERE NOT THROWING AWAY THEIR SHOT.**

Gamaliel, who was a Supreme Court Justice, part of the Cabinet, who was highly respected, asked for the men to be taken outside while they deliberated. He reasoned that perhaps they were actually sent by God. “Who knows, we might even be found fighting against God!” His rational perspective might have saved the lives of the apostles and made space for the church to continue to grow. **HE DIDN’T THROW AWAY HIS SHOT.** The men were still beaten, but they were released, and they didn’t waste any time getting back to teaching and preaching about Jesus.

Today we celebrate a year of ministry and the year that is to come. I celebrate what I’ve been able to learn so far. I celebrate that our faith formation team has been open to considering ways that we could learn as a congregation, so that no matter where a person is on their journey of faith, here at PRCC, you’re invited to go deeper. I celebrate the collaboration among the worship support team, a newly formed committee that seeks to plan, prepare, and lead worship so that things flow smoothly and congregants Sunday morning experiences fill them up

for the week ahead. I celebrate the ways that the Trustees and Finance teams work together to ensure that everything is funded well enough that we can make repairs like replacing the roof, assisting your new Senior Minister in moving to the community, and funding ministries that just crop up like College Student Outreach, without interrupting each and every worship service to ask for a little more.

I celebrate that 175 years was just the beginning of what God is going to do with PRCC, and the plans ahead – you and I have only just begun to imagine! I celebrate that we are tightening up our policies and procedures, so that just a few months ago, the Board passed a Child Protection Policy that will help ensure our children and youth are safe and secure while participating in our ministries. That might have been assumed in years past, but nothing like countless victims in other denominations to awaken us to the reality that children’s safety is a top priority, and no amount of time spent to insure just that, is ever a waste. I celebrate the partnership between our paid staff and lay volunteers in carrying out our missions and ministries. There are so many people who come and give their time and energy week after week and they are **NOT THROWING AWAY THEIR SHOT.**

I sometimes seem to have an innate drive that can drive some folks a little crazy. I think partly it’s because I have grown accustomed to the United Methodist system, where you’re not guaranteed another year, so each year is a gift and you have to make the most of it in that setting. However, I kind of think it goes beyond that.

When I was a child, my health was not the best. Growing up close to Nashville, the best Children’s hospital around was Vanderbilt, and the experts at Vanderbilt Children’s Hospital told my parents that I had a number of anomalies that they didn’t know how to deal with. My liver was failing, and my yellow skin bore witness to the reality that my fatigue was not normal for a 10 year old kid. They discovered I was allergic to everything – the sheets on my bed, the air with its pollen and the dust mites, not to mention poinsettias, Easter lilies, gluten and dairy. I had an unknown bacteria in my blood, and coupled with an auto-immune disorder, I was demonstrating symptoms of more viruses and diseases than they could keep up with. The long and short of it was I would die soon. They couldn’t do a liver transplant because of the rare bacteria. The steroids they would have otherwise used were only accelerating the decline of my liver. So...

**“Enjoy the time you have, she’ll never reach her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday.”**

My grandparents were both pastoring churches in Northern Illinois at that time, and at my grandad’s church in Barrington, Illinois, he raised his granddaughter in their prayer concerns, for the doctors had lost hope. That community of faith prayed. And one member came to share a miracle story about an unconventional doctor. I came and lived with them for a year, went to that doctor every single day, and somehow healing occurred. It’s a happy ending. One that I feel privileged to share because many loved ones I have known haven’t had such a happy ending, and I by no means think that God was with me and not with them.

However, when you're in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and not sure if you will be in 7<sup>th</sup>, you start to value people differently. Some of the drama melts away. Some of the hopes for what might happen in the future become what can you accomplish today. After all, why wait for tomorrow. I'm not throwing away my shot. I think in that period of time, some of my tolerance for minutia diminished and never returned.

I share my story, not for pity. Perhaps for a little understanding when it seems like I am more impatient than most... *(can't we have air conditioning NOW)*...but also because I think this piece of my story is pivotal in who I am and how I operate. None of us are promised tomorrow. So what do we do with today?

The Dalai Lama once said, *"There are only two days in the year that nothing can be done. One is called yesterday and the other is called tomorrow, so today is the right day to love, believe, do, and mostly live."*

After Jesus' resurrection, the game changed. The Apostles felt an urgency, a necessity to share everything they had learned, everything they **KNEW**. They were not intimidated, not thwarted by challenges that came their way. They had to be faithful. Tomorrow was not a promise they held on to, after all, Jesus would be back any minute. In the meantime, today, they had work to do.

I pray that we too will be persistent. The obstacles that may arise to slow us down or cause us to stop and ponder, hopefully will only succeed in clarifying our mission and God's call. As we learn, grow, play and serve God together, may we, as individuals and PRCC, and the world be transformed.

*May we feel the zeal that comes from certainty in knowing we follow the living God, who enlivens us, causes us to see the world differently, and invites us... to not throw away our "Shot."*

Amen.