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11<sup>th</sup> Grade

17 years old

Martin First United Methodist Church

I would like to begin today with a short prayer.

*Dear Heavenly Father, please use me to let your will be done. Help the words that come out of my mouth to bring you glory. Open the hearts of everyone in this room so that they may hear what you have to say. In your most holy name I pray, Amen.*

When I was given the topic of this address, I was immediately excited. From the moment I sat down to write this, I knew I had so much to say. I knew there were so many things I could talk about, so many directions to turn..... and then it hit me; I don't need to just talk. YOU don't need to just talk. WE don't need to just talk. WE need to act. "What do we need to do to offer Christ to a hurting world?" 1 Timothy 4:12 says, "Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity." This verse is teaching us all that we need to know. It is no secret that we live in a broken world. We live in a world full of hatred, violence, and sin. Not only do I see that

when I turn on the news, but I see it when I scroll through social media. I see that when I walk down the halls of my high school. I see it when I look at my friends who are a part of torn families and broken homes. If I were to ask each of you to raise your hand if you have seen the brokenness in our world, every single one of you would have your hand up. However, if I asked you to raise your hand if you have done something to heal that brokenness, how many of you would be able to honestly hold your hand and hold it up high? It is so easy to simply say, "I am a Christian." It is easy to come to church and worship the Lord when you are surrounded by people doing the same, just like it is easy for me to stand here and talk about faith. However, it is when it gets difficult that matters most. It's not so easy to stand in a circle of students in the hallway each morning and pray over my school. It's not always easy to act how Jesus would when I am on the softball field and an incorrect call was made. It's not so easy to turn down the influences and pressures of simply being a teenager. Talking

about being a Christian is easy. Acting as a true Christian would is a little more difficult. I know this because if we all acted Christ-like, this world wouldn't be so broken. There was a young couple with two children at my church last Sunday. I wonder if anyone welcomed them with open arms like Jesus welcomed the children to him that day the disciples said he was too busy. I wonder if anyone told them how good it was to have them in the house of the lord such as we will be welcomed when we go to heaven? Perhaps these thoughts went through the heads of some of my fellow church members. May they thought," someone else will do it?" Perhaps they were too busy making sure that nobody took their pew that they sit in each week. I didn't say a word to that couple. I remember telling myself that it wasn't my job. What if Jesus had said that dying on the cross for our sins wasn't his job? If we are to be leaders for Christ and lights of this world, why are we so often more comfortable following the lead of someone else and hiding in the shadows? How are we supposed to bring others to

Christ if we never leave our safe little bubble? As a softball player, I am constantly reminded to never let the fear of striking out keep me from playing the game. The thought always reminds me that even though I could strike out, I won't know until I try. Softball is a game a lot like life. A great hitter is only successful 3 out of 10 times. This means 7 times, he will fail. The seven times he will fail is not what matters though. What matters most is bouncing back from the trials and failure to get those three hits. When I didn't speak to that family Sunday morning, I struck out. When I simply talk but do not act, I am not getting hits. I am striking out. The good thing about our amazing God is that his forgiveness and grace gives me endless chances to step up to the plate time and time again. My home church recently voted on a new mission statement. It states that we are a "Christ-centered people whose mission is worshipping God, nurturing disciple's, and serving our neighbors, with love." This goes back to the all talking, no action principal. If we are going to abide by this, or any mission statement

for that matter, we have to act. We have to be Christ centered. We have to step out of our comfort zone like Jesus did. We have to be like John Wesley who spent time with the poor and sick. We have to spend a little less time focusing on me and a little more time focusing on others. We have to hit for him each and every time we step up to the plate. We have to worship God with hearts on fire. A little spark is contagious, is it not? We have to serve others with open arms. We have to be the hands and feet of our Lord. I sit in youth each Sunday and I see how the attendance is slacking and yet, I can't remember the last time I invited someone to church. Can you? We are supposed to be shepherds hunting all of the lost sheep out there, just like God did and continues to do for us. My generation will be the ones left in charge someday. Wouldn't it be amazing for the youth to come hand in hand to heal this broken world? 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy tells us that we are not too young. If everyone thinks that someone else will do it, will it ever get done? How hard would it be for us to give up an hour of our time to visit a

homeless shelter? How hard would it be for us to spend a little less money going to movies on Friday nights and instead give that money to someone who really needs it? How hard would it be for us to simply invite a lost soul to church? There are some days when I am so preoccupied with myself and my wants and needs; that I don't really want to go talk to the new kid who is sitting by himself at lunch. But, if we were acting like a Christian, instead of simply saying that I am one, I should be making sure that there isn't a single person sitting alone in that lunch room. If we are to offer Christ to a broken world, then that is what we need to do. We tend to get so caught up in our own lives, that we forgot someone greater than us is pulling the strings. Someone greater than us is at work in our lives, if we will let him be. The church isn't meant to be a museum for the holy, but a hospital for the broken. We are Christians because we aren't perfect and that's okay. Our God is perfect. He knows our every flaw. He knows when we fail. But he also knows our hearts. He knows how much we want

to succeed to bring him glory. We need to create communities where the Presence of God is felt. Imagine what would happen if churches put aside their differences for the common goal of bringing Christ into this world, and keeping him at the center. If someone were to look at your life, and simply see all of your thoughts and actions, would they be able to tell who owns your heart? Just as God can!

In the song Oceans by Hillsong United, we are told:

*Spirit lead me when my trust is without borders  
Let me walk upon the water wherever you will call me  
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wonder  
And my faith will be made stronger in the presence of  
my savior.*

How then can I, only as an entering high school senior serve outside the borders and do so with a passion and selflessness that pulls with the same intensity that pulled at the heart of Jesus to give his life for us? And how can I

ignite that passion to serve with both feet, in my church, family, and beyond? How can I use my God-given gifts to be a light that leads others into his presence? Who am I, to do such amazing things? Who are you, to step up and heal this broken world? But the better question, who am I not, to do such things? Who are you not, to make a difference in someone's life? Who are you not, to be faithful servants of the most Holy. Back to 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, we must remember that nobody is too young or too old to set an example. In speech, we must speak as if we were talking to Jesus. In how we act, we must be compassionate and forgiving. We must be quick to love and slow to anger. We must have faith of a mustard seed and we must share that faith any chance we get. We must be pure such as God's love for us. We must step up to the plate on God's team. So today, I challenge you to remember that even though you may strike out seven times, three times you will stand tall. For 3 months Moses's mother was able to conceal him. Noah had 3 sons. David bowed before Jonathan 3 times. Daniel prayed regularly 3

times a day. Jesus answered Satan's threefold temptation by citing three scriptural passages. And three days later, he rose from the dead. It's time for us to get our 3 hits for Christ. Thank you.