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I enjoy going to the theater to see a musical, a mystery, or especially a comedy. Several years ago, when living in a small town, I decide to audition for our local community theater, not thinking I would get a part. When the director invited me to play a role, I spent hours practicing my lines, then rehearsing on stage with the other actors. I learned firsthand the amount of time it takes for an actor on the stage to not only memorize lines, but to practice the timing in relation to the other actors, while also remembering where to stand and when to move.



Often when attending a drama production, we pay attention to the actors on stage. If it's a musical, we might think about the musicians and appreciate their wonderful sounds. We might even see the director on the final night of the performance when she appears during the curtain call. But how often do we see the lighting crew, the sound technicians, the costume designers, or those who created the backdrops and gathered the props? Without those behind-the-scenes people, the show would never go on. Without them, we



would have a bare, dark stage, with everyone wearing jeans who no one can hear. No matter how much the actors rehearse and memorize their lines, the performance wouldn't be much of a show without those behind the scenes.

This week, as I read the story about the transformation of Saul, I thought of those people behind the scenes, not just in theater productions, but in the Jesus movement as well. When I've heard others talk about this story from Acts, usually the spotlight focuses on Saul along the road to the city of Damascus. There he's transformed from hunting down and persecuting Christians to preaching the good news about Christ. The rest of the book of Acts focuses Saul's travels, who we know better by the name Paul. He tells others about Jesus, and often finds himself in jail for upsetting the status quo, where he writes many letters to churches, writings that make up most of what we today call the New Testament.



If we slow down and look at the story closely, we might catch a glimpse of those behind the scenes. First, we might notice the light crew, for a

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bright light begins flashing, blinding Paul as something like scales form over his eyes. The sound crew takes their cue and a loud voice asks, “Saul, why do you persecute me?”

Saul, better known as Paul, discovers that this is the voice of Jesus, the one whose followers Paul had been killing. The voice tells him to travel to Damascus. Silent actors lurking in the shadows come forward to take his hand and guide him across the stage.

Here we take an intermission as Paul sits for three days without sight, food, or drink, though I

doubt many of us would stay for the second act if we had to wait for more than one day. We

would get restless, shifting in our seats, longing for a pillow to take a nap. The popcorn and soda served at intermission would get tasteless after the second day, and the lines at the bathroom would seem to get longer each day.

But if we wait around for the second act, we will be in store for a dramatic story. The scene opens with another behind-the-scene actor, Ananias.

Behind the Scenes
April 15, 2018

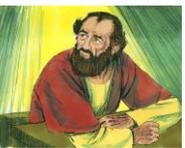
Rev. Dr. Douglas Cripe
Central Christian Church, Elkhart & First Christian Church, Mishawaka

The lighting crew shines a dim light on him as he kneels in prayer. The sound crew cues up a voice calling his name, “Ananias.” The lone character in the scene replies, “Here I am, Lord,” and the voice replies, “Get up and go the street named Straight, find a house, and ask for Paul who is deep in prayer. He’s having a vision about you placing your hands on his head, which will enable him to regain his sight.”

Ananias argues with the voice, saying, “I’ve heard of this evil man. I don’t think this is a good idea, for he has the authority to harm anyone who speaks the name of Jesus.”

The voice seems to echo throughout the auditorium as the sound crew turns up the volume, with a bit of dramatic music playing in the background. “Get up and go, for I’ve chosen him to tell many, many people about me. The job won’t be easy, and he’ll suffer along the way, but it will be worth it.”

The stage crew jumps into action, changing the set to reflect another location, where Paul sits in prayer. The light crew places a soft light on Paul.



Acts 9:1-19

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Ananias arrives at the house, knocks on the door, and places his hands on Paul's head. The lighting crew adds bright lights to the scene as something like scales fall from Paul's eyes, who then regains his sight.

After the final scene, as you wonder who directed such an amazing event, you search through the program, which was prepared by another behind-the-scenes person. You read, "This event was written, produced, and directed by Jesus, who also served as the mysterious off-stage voice throughout the drama and turned on the lights."

Although Paul served a major role in this production, the real star of the show is behind the scenes, for although we never see Jesus, he played the most important part. But there were also other integral behind-the-scene players: Ananias, and those who led Paul to see Ananias when Paul could not see. Without these characters, Paul would have remained along the road, unable to see. No scales falling from his eyes. No visits to churches. No imprisonment. No letter writing. No New Testament.

It's a bit like the work of the Dutch teacher, Johan van Hulst, who died last month at the age of 107. Ever heard of him? Probably not, for he was behind the scenes saving children during the Holocaust. He taught at a college next to a daycare that served as a detainment center for Jewish children waiting deportation by the Nazis. Knowing the children who remained in the center would die, daycare workers passed a few children at a time over a hedge between the center and the college, and Hulst hid the children in a room at the college until they could be smuggled to safety. Of the 4000 children held in the daycare center from 1942 to 1943, Hulst helped a thousand escape to safety.¹

A name many never heard. Behind the scenes. Out of sight. No spotlight. Working in danger. But without his behind-the-scenes work, one thousand more children would have died. To those children, he played a major role in God's work.

He was a bit like Ananias, working behind the scenes. A name we may forget. Some might not even know what he did. But as one writer noted, "The people who work behind the scenes are every



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bit as critical to God's mission as the people whose stories are dramatic and renowned."²



I imagine you can think of names of countless behind-the-scenes people in the history of our congregation who are no longer with us but helped create this beautiful space in which we worship. Not just the builders, but the leaders who shaped the faith of those in this place, those who inspired trust. Those who inspired you to study and learn. I invite you to name some of those behind-the-scenes people who shaped your faith, who inspired you to follow Jesus...



Today we continue to have behind-the-scenes people. Often, we don't see the work of teachers, Elders, deacons, council/board members, committee members. We don't always know who's behind the scenes cooking and serving food, repairing and cleaning the building, budgeting and counting money, inviting people to worship,

participating in mission in our community by living their faith at work or school, taking communion to our homebound members, bringing food for the food pantry, offering a prayer for someone who is ill, sending a card to brighten someone's day, or worshiping together with others to magnify God's presence among us. If you have ever done something behind the scenes for our church, for Jesus, please wave your arms.

Two thousand years later we celebrate the behind-the-scenes work of Ananias and those who helped Paul to see. Seventy-five years later we celebrate those who helped people in the Holocaust escape to safety. And today we celebrate all those who created this place filled with faithful people who continue working behind the scenes to continue God's mission of bringing hope to the world.

¹ "He Helped Save Hundreds of Children During the Holocaust," *The Mishawaka Enterprise*, April. 5, 2018, p. 1.

² Narrative Lectionary *Program 2 2017-18* Worship Resources, 2017, Clergy Stuff, p. 156.