

(NEVER UNDERESTIMATE) THE POWER OF SHOWING UP

I Samuel 3.1-10

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Lesson: I Samuel 3.1-10

3Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴Then the LORD called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. ⁶The LORD called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Sermon: (Never Underestimate) The Power of Showing Up

Imagine. Honestly, there were times in this doctoral process when I could *not* imagine. I said to myself: “You are a dreamer if you think you are ever going to get this thing done.”

And I want to thank the musicians of today because the music throughout this service is a testimony to the inspiration that made the dream a reality. And I hope this music inspired you today to imagine.

I've included a note in the bulletin describing why each of the pieces of music we heard and sang today is, in part, responsible for the celebration of *this* day. I leaned on and leaned into this music over those six years.

And I'll add to those notes, the *Trolls* song by Belle and our children:
*Hey, I'm not giving up today, there's nothing standing in my way.
And if you knock, knock me over, I will get back up again.*

Of course, I wasn't always sure I would get back up again. And it wasn't just the music that got me through.

It was the presence of people who believed in me – who imagined for me what I could not imagine for myself. There are a lot of people on that list. Not the least of which is my beloved, Patrick Green.

See, when our values statement says that “we will be present to one another,” I am here to tell you about the power of that presence – about the power of showing up.

Now I will understand if you lost track that I was graduating at 2 p.m. on Saturday, May 19, because there was another event earlier that day that overshadowed everything else.

That morning was also the royal wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Did you watch?

I didn't. But I did read Bishop Curry's sermon at the wedding. And one of the things he said was:

*Now the power of love is demonstrated by the fact that we are all here.
Two young people fell in love and we all showed up.*

And that got me thinking. Imagine if the royal family had chosen *not* to show up. Imagine the signal that would send. Here is Prince Harry marrying a commoner, an American, the daughter of an African-American mother. Imagine the negative power in not being present.

So, Bishop Curry is exactly right to point out: Here we all are; we all showed up.

And the monarchy will never be the same.

And that leads me to the one thing I want to say this morning: *Never underestimate the power of showing up.*

The story about Samuel this morning read to us by Spencer is a story about a young person learning to show up.

The context of that story is that it was a troubled time in the people's life together. There was open corruption in the government. Eli was the leader of the nation and his own children were making a mockery of faith and of justice. Things were so bad that it seemed like God wasn't speaking anymore and there were no new visions. It's like no one could imagine a way forward.

And then this young person heard a voice calling in the night. He doesn't exactly know whose voice it is. He gets confused. "He is unfamiliar," the story says, "with the voice of God."

But he keeps showing up anyway: "Here I am; here I am, here I am."

Sometimes I think we don't show up because we aren't sure who or what is calling us. We hear an unfamiliar voice and so we shut down rather than show up.

I was reading an article by Kimberly Knowle-Zeller about being caught in a funeral procession she didn't know about for a police officer she didn't know.

She was stuck in the car with a fussy 3-year old and she didn't know what to do. Finally, she just turned off the engine and sat.

And what she saw was men and women who likely didn't all know each other, showing up to share each other's grief.

And then she realized that unintentionally, *she* had showed up: *It wasn't our intention to be at a standstill surrounded by the procession, she writes. But that's where we found ourselves. And as we waited and watched, I couldn't help but think of the power found in being present to one another. Being present in community. Even a community we may not know ... underneath all the labeling and naming ... are people. People with lives and loves and jobs to do. People with hopes and dreams. People with families. People who look out for the neighbor ...* As the procession passed, she says, *I prayed ... prayers that our lives do make a difference; that we remember the power in showing up ... over and over again.*

Sometimes like Samuel we don't know who or what is calling us. We hear a voice that is unfamiliar to us and find ourselves in situations we didn't intend.

And Eli's advice to Samuel is to show up anyway because ... *Never underestimate the power of showing up.*

Sometimes I've noticed that I don't show up because I don't think I will know what to *do* when I get there.

Sometimes hospital visits are hard for me because I'm not sure I'll know what to do or say. Sometimes I get invited to interfaith events or protest marches and it feels awkward to me because I'm afraid I won't know what to do. So I'm reluctant to show up.

I'm wearing this robe today not to show off my accomplishment but as a testimony to those who taught me about showing up. I've told the story a number of times but I'll say one more time that this robe was given to me by Marilyn Pulliam after the death of her husband Walt.

That was a big deal because Walt and Marilyn are a huge presence in my life. They helped me imagine what it looks like to show up for the work of love and justice. So having this robe is a treasure and a testimony about the responsibility that goes with it.

But when Marilyn first gave it to me, there was one problem. “Marilyn,” I said, “I cannot wear this robe until I’ve earned those doctoral chevrons.”

And Marilyn, in her usual quiet and demur way said: “Well I better not be dead before I see you in it.”

That’s a challenge.

So I worked and I worked and things knocked me down and I did my best to get up again.

And then the call came. I was working on the last chapter of that dissertation when Marilyn’s son called to say: “Tim, I don’t think mom is going to make it through the night.”

What was I supposed to do? I didn’t make it. I hadn’t done what I said I would do. What was I supposed to do now?

Show up. All I could do was show up. And so I grabbed the robe and Patrick and I rushed to Overlake Hospital and we sat by her bed. It looked like she was unconscious by the time we got there but it didn’t matter. I didn’t know what to do and I hadn’t done what I said I would do but that it didn’t matter. The only thing that mattered was showing up.

Beloved ones, please don’t let not knowing what to do keep you from showing up. There are hungry people and lonely people and broken people and people under attack and it isn’t always clear what to do. We haven’t always done all that we could do. But show up anyway because ... *Never underestimate the power of showing up.*

Now that I'm done with my doctoral work I can finally read some of things I haven't had time for. One of them is a book by Winn Collier about what it takes to just be church – not 10 steps to be the biggest, most powerful, most hip church. Just what it takes to be church.

And one of his models is a group of about six folks who meet just about every weekday morning for breakfast:

For 32 years now, he writes, that cadre of friends has shared their coffee, shared their news, and celebrated retirements, graduations, and grandkids. They've stood beside one another at funerals and during sickness and divorce. They've showed up morning after morning through the tedious rigors that fill [all] our lives. They don't harangue each other into participating and they don't try too hard to define what they've got. And they don't always get along either – I know, because I've overheard their heated exchanges during election season ... Still, they just keep showing up for one another, as often as they are able.

Beloved ones, you may not always know who or what is calling you; the voice might sound unfamiliar; it might speak a different language; you may find yourself in situations you did not intend, but show up anyway because ... *Never underestimate the power of showing up.*

And when you get there, you may not know what to do, but show up anyway because ... *Never underestimate the power of showing up.*

When it's 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning and there are all kinds of other things you could be doing, show up for worship anyway because ... *Never underestimate the power of showing up.*

You may never know the difference your life has made in the world and in the lives of one another.

But if it is true that there is a power already at work within you that is able to accomplish far more than any of us can ask or imagine, show up anyway.

And if you, like Samuel, hear that voice calling in the night, do not harden your hearts. Show up.

NOTES

Bishop Curry's sermon can be found at www.nytimes.com/2018/05/19/style/bishop-michael-curry-royal-wedding.html. The article by Kimberly Knowle-Zeller, "The Power of Showing Up," is at www.redletterchristians.org. Winn Collier, *Love Big, Be Well* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), p.143.