

“Just Show Up” – Thanksgiving Sunday (November 20th, 2015)
Matthew 6:25-34
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“The more I eat, I find, the more I am inclined to shout and sing hosanna...”

Now that’s a great thanksgiving soundtrack.

It’s one more beautiful piece from the choir. It’s one more reason to be thankful.

So, thank you for the beauty of your voices and the excellence of your music.

Great debates will unfold around countless dinner tables this week. These conversations bring both joy and consternation to holiday meals. Sometimes these debates fill us with excitement and sometimes with mortal dread. It’s not just the food many of us appreciate – especially when we recognize how little food others have – it’s also the stories we share.

I love the shared stories and the shared food in equal measure. And yet there’s one part of Thanksgiving – any shared meal, really – that is ultimately more important.

Showing up.

If you don’t show up, you don’t get to share the food *or* the stories.

I suppose that’s kind of how church works, too.

In this passage, which is part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says “Don’t worry about clothes; don’t worry about food – but strive for the Kingdom (some would say the Kindom) of God.” The focus is on building something far greater, and the first step is showing up.

I feel like this sounds like I’m being flip. “Just show up.” I don’t mean it to be. In the hectic patterns of life, showing up – the gift of your presence is one of the greatest things you can offer. I covet your presence in this sanctuary on Sunday mornings, in

Fellowship hall on Wednesday evenings, in the choir room and in commission meetings. It's your presence that inspires others to strive for the kingdom, even if the kingdom only begins as a quiet reality.

In this time following Pledge Sunday, as we prepare for Advent; on this Sunday that we dedicate a little baby and celebrate her life with her parents who have been so present in this community; in this time when the word 'refugee' carries a diminutive connotation, and the possibilities of hope and home are cause for debate and division, not compassion or comfort; in *this* time, maybe we should remind ourselves what a gift it is to our friends and family and neighbors – whoever they may be – what a gift it is to show up.

Because in these instances (and many others) the ministry of presence is profound, it is life-giving, it is subversive, it's inspiring.

"Do not worry about other things," Jesus says, "Instead strive for the kingdom." Jesus indicates the closeness of the kingdom, the inevitability of the kingdom, "For it is coming near." In Luke, remember, he says, "Some will say, 'Look there it is,' and others will say, 'No there it is over there,' but I tell you, the Kingdom is among you."

It's not necessarily the magnitude of striving for something outside of ourselves, but simply being aware of what is already unfolding in our midst in great and powerful ways.

Striving for the kingdom begins when *you* show up.

If you show up, who knows what will happen. It's a sign of your commitment, and of your affection – and given this climate we live in, we all need a little affection, don't we?

For me, the most moving images of the Pope's recent visit were those times he stopped his motorcade to be present and to show affection.

You may have seen the story about the small boy with cerebral palsy. The weekend of the Pope's arrival the family had decided they couldn't bring their son because his wheelchair was too heavy and the lift on their van was broken. Sunday morning their priest offered a homily saying the first step of radical welcome is to show up. Moved by these words, the family lifted the boy and his wheel chair into their van and showed up to welcome Pope Francis. For them, his blessing of their child validated their presence, but more than that, suggested to them he held a deep appreciation for the work it took to raise a child born with these challenges. As I read this story, I couldn't help but think about that beautiful boy, Howie Cates, and his parents, Kim and Charles, who do the work they need to do every morning to get him in the car and just show up.

When we're willing to show up, we create new possibilities for blessings and grace. And yet, as this story illustrates, it's not always as simple as just showing up.

Our ability to show up is being increasingly challenged.

For all of us, the natural processes of aging or the decline of health will eventually make it really hard to be physically present. Our task is to continue to be in relationship with those unable to be *physically* here and let them know they're still with us, in our thoughts, and in the prayers we offer on their behalf – AND that *we're* still present with *them*.

Maybe for others, the task of being present has become more difficult as the pastoral team shifts, and members of our staff retire. Maybe – and I'm speaking to folks who might be watching this online – maybe when Pastors Craig or Cathy retired, you felt

like you were losing *your* pastor. Perhaps you continue to grieve that loss in a way. Maybe some of you have some anxiety about Bob's upcoming retirement – I sure do. But when we come together, we can name those things that trouble us, and we can address them head-on. I name these tensions from the pulpit because that's the beauty of a solid community, the gift given through mutual support, and the sign of a healthy system. It's ok to face these challenges, provided we get to do it together.

For still others, showing up will become increasingly difficult because the economic climate in this city prizes a downtown filled with people who can afford to be here. This challenge is already true for some of us. Even today we feel its affects. Being present is then about raising awareness and giving faces to the individuals and families who will no longer be *able* to be present without help. With new construction in the Capitol and First Hill neighborhoods, our Spire will literally stand among shadows. It is our kingdom-call to be present in an ever-changing neighborhood, and to be a voice for those left voiceless – those that need housing to be affordable.

Remember, we strive for a kingdom that is close at hand – a kingdom even already among us.

It seems like such a simple thing, presence. But any grief counselor who has gone to a high school after a mass shooting – any hospice worker who has attended the failing life of another human-being can tell you it's not so simple at all. Within the ministry of presence we recognize need, we address dark places, or we do work that sometimes seems too difficult to do.

My first call to parish ministry was to a small but affluent church in a suburb of Boston. Not yet settled, and barely unpacked in my office, I received a call that a

matriarch of the church suffered a stroke and was in the ICU. When I took the call, I learned the family had already been with her for eight hours, and so I rushed to be with them. When I arrived, they were all gathered around her bedside. I took her hand and prayed with her at their request. It was a tender time, but it kept getting interrupted by this really annoying crunching sound. Every few minutes her son popped a tic-tac in his mouth, one after the other, and then slowly crunched down on them. At first I was put off, but then the light dawned. “Have you eaten anything today?” I asked. “Not since breakfast,” was his answer. A quick look at the wall clock told me it was 7 in the evening, so I made my way to the cafeteria and collected food for the family members who didn’t want to leave her bedside.

They were hungry for presence, they were also just hungry, and meeting both needs allowed them to settle down and gain some perspective on their anxiety.

We strive for the Kingdom together and work in both complex and simple ways to be present. In a week we begin Advent – a time of waiting and expectation. A time we remember the simple gift of divine presence when the stories tell us God became manifest – God just showed up in a tiny bundle, crying and defenseless. A reminder that God shows up in every child and calls us to wonder, joy, and thanksgiving.

That is a kingdom worth striving for, a kingdom worth being present in. As we move toward the simple gifts of the Advent season, let’s pause this week and be thankful for the beauty of these simple moments we share.

Amen.

