

Holy Wisdom, teach us to hear your desire for our lives and to live it out, in your name. Amen.

Many of you know that I lost a cousin in a car accident about a month and a half ago. This cousin and her parents adopted me in to their family when I was living near them for seminary. I spent holidays with them for those three years, and we made important memories together... like going to see the musical Spamalot on Broadway during its opening season.

I am going to miss my cousin. And my heart breaks for my aunt and uncle. Needless to say, I traveled to Connecticut for her funeral, as did the rest of my immediate family. My aunt and uncle asked for my help picking out Bible passages for her funeral, and I ended up reading one of them during the service.

When I got up to read, I looked out at the congregation to see a room so full, people were standing at the back. And then I realized that I recognized one of those standing figures – and not because he was a relative.

Alan was a seminary classmate of mine. He currently serves at an Episcopal church near where my aunt and uncle live.

He had seen my post on Facebook about my cousin’s funeral, and decided to take time out of his busy schedule to support me and my family.

I had no idea that Alan was coming, but when I saw him in the back of the room that day, I felt his support and encouragement as a tangible thing.

We didn’t even get a chance to visit – I gave Alan a hug on my way out of the church, then I continued to the cemetery for graveside services, while Alan headed back to work. But we didn’t need to exchange many words. The important thing was that he had been there. Alan knew that my family and I had a need, and he thought he might be able to help fill it, so even though he had never met her, he showed up to my cousin’s funeral.

And the fact that he showed up made a tremendous difference to me, and to my grieving process on that day.

He didn’t have to do anything. Simply being there was enough – was more than enough – to make a difference.

Showing up. Sometimes that is all it takes.

You know that phrase, eighty percent of success is showing up?

Well, apparently Woody Allen’s original quote was “80% of life is showing up” – but when asked about it later, he said that 80% of success is showing up.

<https://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/06/10/showing-up/>

It's really true sometimes. What's most important isn't what is said or done, it's the fact that you were in the right place at the right time.

This is what the laborers discovered in today's parable. Some of them showed up first thing in the morning, and some of them hit the snooze button a few times, but eventually they all found their way to the marketplace, where employers knew to go to find day laborers. They all got hired. And they all got paid. And they all earned the same amount.

For the landowner, what mattered wasn't how long the workers had toiled in the vineyard. What was important was that they had shown up.

Maybe the landowner knew of the extraordinary need of some of the laborers who were hired later in the day. Or maybe he was feeling generous toward them.

Or maybe the only money he had were denarius coins, so he decided to give one to every worker regardless of their hours worked.

We are given no clue as to the motivations of the landlord. All we know is that he was incredibly generous to those folks who were hired later in the day, without taking away anything he had promised from those who were hired earlier.

Eighty percent of success is showing up.

Who knew that Woody Allen and Jesus shared a philosophy?

Last Sunday after worship, my husband and I grabbed a quick lunch and then drove across town to the birthday party of a 5-year-old. Maya's parents are some of our closest friends – I've known her mom for something like 22 years, and her dad for at least 19.

But, keep in mind – this was Sunday afternoon. One pastor I know is adamant that Sunday afternoons are reserved for a PLN – post-liturgical nap! And last Sunday was my first time being here for the 2-service fall schedule. I was tired!

And it was a little bit warm in here last Sunday, since we're still trying to figure out the best timing for our new HVAC controllers.

And we hadn't had time to buy a card for Maya, so we had to stop somewhere on the way over to their house... and then the only pen we had in the car was one of those gel ink ones that smudged all over the place. And we didn't know if presents were expected or not, and we didn't have time to buy one anyway, so we didn't.

There were so many reasons why we could have chosen *not* to go to Maya's birthday party last weekend.

But we decided that it was more important to go, even if our card was smudged and we didn't have a present and I was all sweaty and tired after leading worship in the morning.

So we went.

And it was awesome.

Maya didn't care about any of the things that we could have used as excuses not to come. All she cared about was that we showed up! I am so glad that we did. Now we have memories of spending this birthday with her, and photographic evidence of her mom and me playing with the new blue and purple hair extensions that she received as a birthday gift.

Showing up mattered. It made all the difference.

Last fall I attended a local rally in support of the water protectors at Standing Rock. I had heard about the event, thought about going, but was still undecided. There were plenty of other things I could have been doing with my day – important things that needed to get done!

But one of the members of Lake Edge reminded me that the rally was happening, and I thought, well, maybe I should go.

Once I got there, I looked around for other recognizable clergy – folks wearing a collar or a stole. I didn't see any.

I realized that it was important that I had chosen to show up to that rally, in my clergy collar, so that the water protectors could see a visible clergy presence standing in solidarity with them. In this case, showing up mattered not so much because of who I am personally, but because of what I represent as a pastor in a Christian church.

The important thing was to be there, and to show the community that there are Christian leaders who love them and support their cause.

My 5-year-old friend and those water protectors filled the role of gracious employer to me, even when I showed up in one of the later shifts in the day.

Our Scriptures are full of stories about people who may not really want to show up, but who do so anyway, and are richly rewarded for their efforts.

Moses secured the freedom of the Hebrew people.

Ruth found a protector and a husband.

David defeated a giant.

Mary and the other women discovered the empty tomb on Easter.

Jonah...

When Jonah heard a call from God to go to Nineveh to get them to repent, he initially ran the opposite direction! After a very close encounter with a big fish, Jonah had a change of heart and decided to go to Nineveh after all.

But he didn't have a *complete* change of heart. Nineveh was a huge city, and it would have taken three days to walk all the way across. Jonah only goes about a third of the way in to the city, and doesn't deliver his message in a particularly eloquent way or at any important venues.

But even your average Ninevite could recognize the dire warning that Jonah preached. Word spread quickly, and the entire city adopted an attitude of repentance almost immediately.

http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3377

All that Jonah had to do was show up to Nineveh, and his message was both received and believed. This is unheard of for biblical prophets!

And Jonah was ticked about it.

See, here's the flip side of "showing up matters."

Sometimes, those folks who have been around for longer can get resentful of those who have just shown up. Those who put in tremendous amounts of effort may become jealous of someone to whom everything seems to come easily.

Jonah expected that the Ninevites would be punished, as God had threatened.

Those workers who were hired first and put in a long workday expected to be paid more than those who came in for just the last hour of the day.

A scene from one of my favorite movies comes to mind.

In *The Princess Bride*, the boy interrupts the story his grandfather is reading to him and insists that the plot cannot possibly be unfolding as his grandfather describes. It wouldn't be fair! The grandfather replies, "Who says life is fair? Where is that written? Life isn't always fair."

Don't we know it.

I would bet a lot of money that every person in this room knows what it feels like to be treated unfairly – to be denied something that was simply given over to someone else without question.

That something might be money, as in today's parable.

It might be reputation, as in Jonah's story.

You and I have probably seen other people get credit for our ideas, or buy the house we dreamed of owning, or be treated with respect by folks who won't give us the time of day.

Life isn't always fair.

Because we serve a God who isn't fair.

We serve a God who loves us like Maya loves me, with all of my imperfections, even when I show up late to her birthday party and don't bring a gift and am still kind of sweaty and tired from working all morning.

This is called grace.

When we see others receiving recognition and support for their effort of simply showing up, even though we've been laboring for hours or years under strenuous conditions and have received no reward for our toil – when we see that happening, we can easily get resentful.

How does that person deserve such grace?

Well, that's the beauty of grace. By definition, it is never given because it's deserved, but because the person offering it is able to show love.

And our God is able to show bucketsful of love.

All we have to do is show up – be present to receive God's love.

So, that is the good news for today: God loves indiscriminately!

And here is today's call to action.

Where can you show up where it might make a difference? What are the places that matter, physically, virtually, socially, spiritually... what places could be made better by you showing up there?

I can give you the first answer. You already took the step to be in at least one place today. This congregation is made stronger by you being here. I am glad that you chose to show up to church this morning.

And for anyone listening to (or reading) this sermon online after the fact, I am glad that you chose to show up to our virtual faith community!

But I bet we can come up with more ways for you to show up, and more places where you can make a difference by your very presence.

How does your family need you today?

How can your presence make a difference at your workplace?

Are there online discussion forums that could use your involvement, or organizations that would benefit from your membership?

I can't answer these questions for you – like Jonah, you'll need to follow God's guidance as to where you're needed.

But today, I hope that you will choose to go – to show up – to any place where you feel God calling. Even if you're not sure you want to be there, trust in the example of the workers in the vineyard, and Jonah, and even Woody Allen.

Showing up matters.

So please, show up. It can make all the difference.

And when you do, also remember that God isn't always fair.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.