

10-15-17 Sermon: “Showing Up: God Asks for Our Time” – Luke 14:15-24

Sometimes, the most important thing we can do is simply show up.

We’ve been talking about stewardship these last few weeks, about giving thanks to God for the blessings we have received and expressing that gratitude by returning those gifts to God. We’ve talked about stewardship of our treasure, dedicating a portion of our money to the work of God’s Kingdom. Last week we talked about stewardship of our talents, about allowing God to transform even our most ordinary and skills to accomplish things that are truly extraordinary.

And now this week, I want us to take a few minutes to consider the way we spend our time. Because that’s part of stewardship too, and of all the gifts we receive from God, I’m inclined to believe that time is in fact the most precious. And perhaps because time is so precious, I’ll be the first to admit that stewardship of my time is the area where I can be the most tight-fisted. Life is so busy, and there’s always so much to do; I want to be doing God’s work in the world, but so often I find myself thinking, “I don’t know if I have *time* to show up.”

I wonder if this might be how the invited guests felt in Jesus’ parable this morning. I wonder if they, too, wanted to come to the banquet but weren’t sure if they really had the *time* to show up.

A man prepares a great banquet and invites all his friends. But when he sends for them, they begin to make excuses. One begs off to go look at a piece of land he has just purchased. Another says she needs to go and try out her new teams of oxen. Another one has just gotten married, perhaps gives the host’s slave a little wink, and says, “I’ll be...uh...busy.” And so none of the original guests get to taste the host’s great banquet.

I feel sad for these dinner guests – and not just because they turn down delicious, free food. I feel sad because I recognize a little of myself in them. I feel sad because they are so tied up in the cares of the world – in their work, their possessions, the expectations associated with their family role – that they feel like they can’t afford to rearrange their schedules for a banquet, a celebration. They can’t make the time to simply show up.

After all, that’s all the host asks of them, isn’t it? Just to show up. The first guest doesn’t say, “But my jello salad hasn’t set yet, I can’t come empty handed!” The second guest doesn’t protest, “But my seven-layer dip only has six layers – I can’t show up without putting the cheese on top!” There is no expectation from the host that his guests bring or do anything at all. All he asks is that they show up.

Friends, when it comes to stewardship of our time, when it comes to returning to God the gift of our days and hours, more often than not, that is all that God asks of us: that we simply show up.

Of course, God’s call in our lives to show up – for God and for one another – is not always as clear cut as an invitation to dinner. How do we listen for that call from God? How – and where – do we make that commitment and show up?

To start with, we can show up for God and one another right here, when we gather for worship. I know, surprise surprise, the pastor wants you to show up to church. And it’s true: *I do* think it’s important that we show up here, week after week after week. But it’s not because I think that everything I say up here is pure spiritual brilliance. It’s not because I believe that every worship service you come to at First Presbyterian Church of Taos is going to rock your world, restore your faith in God and humanity, give you exactly what you need to go out into the world this week and live as a disciple of Christ.

Don't get me wrong, I *do* hope that you get something out of worship. I do hope, and I pray, that somewhere – in the midst of these songs and prayers and rituals and reading and proclamation and sacraments – that somewhere you will, each of you, have an encounter with the holy. Hear the Word from God that you need to hear, today. I *do* hope that when you walk out that door each week, you know deep in your bones that you are and will always be a beloved disciple of Jesus Christ. But that's not all of why we gather here, not the reason we show up Sunday after Sunday.

Friends, we gather for worship because God calls us to gather for worship. We show up to God's banquet because we are invited to the banquet. We show up to worship and glorify the God revealed in Jesus Christ and to listen for what the Spirit is saying to us today.

And we show up to worship so that we can show up for one another. We show up because we are a community, and we're in this together. I may not feel like I need the support of this Christian community this week, but maybe you do. Next week, you may fine, but I'm the one who needs love, care, or guidance. The week after that, we're both ok, but someone else needs a shoulder to cry on or the simple kindness of a smile. We show up each week so that we can be the Body of Christ for one another; we show up trusting that the God who calls us here calls us for a reason. And in doing so, friends, we show up for one another.

Worship may be where we start to show up for one another, but it's certainly not where it ends. Every day, we are presented with opportunities to show up for God and for one another. But you know, I'm not sure I necessarily need to remind you all of that because, well, this congregation knows a thing or two about showing up for one another. In the short time I've been with you, I've seen you sit in hospital rooms with fellow members. I've seen you offer each other rides and meals. I've seen you check in on those who are sick or grieving. I've seen you visit our homebound members, and gather for work days to paint and pull weeds. I've seen you rally around members of this congregation who have had to leave Taos for their health – offering emotional and logistical support; helping them pack their homes, and setting out with them on road trips so they don't have to make the journey alone.

In fact, just this week, with hardly two days' notice, I saw four of you show up for a visitor to this congregation who needed help. And as I drove away that afternoon after loading up her U-Haul, it occurred to me: I'm not sure that all of you who came to help had even *met* this person before you showed up on her doorstep with open arms and open hearts. When it comes to being faithful stewards of our time, friends, you all know how to show up for one another.

It's precisely because of this that, as we look toward 2018 and the future of our congregation that I'm inclined to challenge us – as a church – to take this holy practice of showing up one step further. We are well-practiced in showing up for each other, for the people we know and with whom we have covenanted to be in community. So how might we, as individuals – but even more importantly, as a church – practice showing up for people whom we *don't* yet know?

In our Gospel reading this morning, before Jesus tells the Parable of the Great Banquet, he gives us some instructions on what it looks like to practice radical, God-like hospitality. “When you give a dinner,” he says, “do not invite your friends, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; for they will invite you in return and you will be repaid. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Invite the people living at the margins of society. Invite the people who would least expect to receive your invitation. People who for one reason or another have been told by this world that they are worthless, a liability, an abomination. Invite these people to your table,” Jesus says, “And seat them as the guests of honor.”

These days, it's not too hard to find people who fit Jesus' description, is it? People who are cursed, maligned, cast aside, simply because of who they are. Just take a look at our national rhetoric. In the last year, hate crimes in our nation have risen significantly, and all sorts of people – of God's own children – are receiving messages saying, "You are not welcome. You are not wanted. You are not invited to the great banquet." Indigenous people. Women. People of color. People who are Muslims; people who are Jews; people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. People whose first language isn't English. People who don't have adequate employment, or food, or housing.

At the end of the parable, it is these very people – the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame – who feast at the great banquet. When the master's guests fail to show up, these are the people he seeks out – calls in from the streets and alleys and even outside the city gates – and they show up. For God, for one another, for the banquet. When they all sit down to eat, the very people whom the world has cast aside are the guests of honor at Jesus' table.

Friends, what might it look like for us, as a church, to show up for these neighbors? How can we show up for the people in our community who are pushed to the margins, for the people among us who are living in fear? Who are the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame, in our world today? The queer, the undocumented, the mentally ill, the homeless? The addicted, the disabled vet, the ex-con, the refugee? These are the people who feast at God's table. These are God's own beloved people – they are you, and they are me, and we together are the Body of Christ. How can we draw our circle wider and show up for one another – publicly and unashamed – as God's whole Beloved Community?

"All you who thirst," calls the Prophet Isaiah, "come to the waters. You who have no money, come buy and eat. Come by wine and milk without money and without price, and delight yourself in rich food." Friends, the table is set, and the banquet is prepared. And God is calling us – out of our busy routines, out of our comfort zones to feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. God invites us, time and time, and time again. So now we get to answer – will we show up?