

Series: Words & Deeds Part 2: “Really! They Are Life Changing”
“Everyone Must Show Up”

Jonah 3:10-4:11

Psalm 145:1-8

Philippians 1:21-30

Matthew 20:1-16

Enthusiasm for life, God, and others generates exponential impact and growth for you and others. Whether you're first or last to show up, it takes everyone to make a difference, whether it's at a family gathering, church, school, or homeowners' association meeting. And the most important aspect of showing up is to be grateful for the opportunity to gather with others.

Ponder this:

You take approximately 23,000 breaths every day, but when was the last time you thanked God for one of them? The process of inhaling oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide is a complicated respiratory task that requires physiological precision. We tend to thank God for the things that take our breath away. And that's fine. But maybe we should thank [God] him for every other breath too!¹

What would unite every human to be grateful for one another? The “it” factor is the innate dignity of every human being. Every human being is created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*.

Jonah 3:10-4:11, Psalm 145:1-8, Philippians 1:21-30, and Matthew 20:1-16 have one thing in common: what matters most is showing up in gratitude regardless of the circumstances.

I will use the Jonah and Matthew texts to drive home the point that what matters most is showing up with gratitude regardless of the circumstances.

In the early chapters of Jonah, Jonah 1:1-3:9, we are reminded that Jonah was a disobedient prophet who outright objected to his divine appointment. He fled toward Tarshish, dropped down to Joppa and boarded a ship headed for the port at Tarshish. A great storm arose

¹Mark Batterson, *All In* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2013), 119.

and tossed the ship about. The sailors cast lots to see who would cast Jonah overboard. They needed Jonah off the ship because they knew he was the problem causing the storm. A large fish swallowed Jonah and vomited on a beach near Nineveh. In Jonah 3:10-4:11, we learn of Jonah's anger and contempt for God. Nineveh was the place of the people of God's arch enemies. For the Assyrian empire captured the Northern Kingdom in the 8th century BC. His anger was honest, and God's mercy was outrageous. When he finally arrived at Nineveh, he sat outside the city gate and complained how hot it was. God provided a plant to give him shade. Yet, when morning came, God appointed a worm to eat the plant. And when the sun rose, it produced a sultry wind and the sun beat down on Jonah. Jonah wanted to die and was angry. But God pointed out to him that he was angrier about his misery than God having concern for the city of Nineveh in which there were over a hundred and twenty-thousand people who did not know their right hand from their left. God wanted Jonah to show up for those folks.

Recall the workers in the vineyard from the text in Matthew 20:1-16. All received the same wage regardless of what time they started to work. This action infuriated those who arrived first and saw those who arrived after them, particularly those who arrived last, receiving the same amount of money as those who were first. God is generous with God's love, mercy, and grace to all who show up regardless of the time.² Those who arrived first were furious. Such an injustice had occurred from their perspective.

We would do well if we could see how we behave like Jonah and the workers who show up first. In that process of growing self-awareness, we too could understand why some people

²In the two paragraphs of textual analysis above, I have benefited from the thinking of Anthea E. Portier-Young, Pamela J. Scalise, Donna Giver-Johnston, Cynthia A. Jarvis, Elizabeth M. Bounds, Whitney Bodman, and Shawnthea Monroe in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 316-319, 319-321, 322-324, 325-327, 327-328, 329-331, and 331-333.

are upset at good things happening to bad people, and why some workers skate through their jobs, abusing the system with no consequences, and still get paid. What is it that people who perceive themselves better than others do to others? They judge them. We are not to pass judgment on others. Rob Bell, the author of *Love Wins* writes,

Trust God, accept Jesus, confess, repent, and everything will go well for you. But if you don't, well, the Bible is quite clear...Sin, refuse to repent, harden your heart, reject Jesus, and when you die, it's over. Or actually, the torture and anguish and eternal torment will have just begun. That's how it is—because that's what God is like, correct?³

The message of Jesus is this: your actions do not determine whether heaven or hell is your final destination. Remembering, telling, and living the way of Jesus does. Showing up, regardless of your feelings about the context in which you're showing up, is what matters most. Your words and deeds will make a difference.

Love is the way God always captures us from our selfish and self-serving ways. More often than not, being selfish and self-serving tricks you into not showing up. Thus, all you can do, if you need to use a verb, is to be present...to show up. Love is experienced through your words and deeds when you show up. Everyone must show up first or last. We're all needed to participate in God's mission. We need each other. Show up! Amen!

*This sermon was preached on Sunday, 24 September 2023 by the Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh
at Geneva Presbyterian Church in Laguna Woods, California*

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³Rob Bell, *Love Wins* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2011), 64.