

Thank you for showing up today. Whether you come to our worship services in person or on-line, it still counts as showing up. You made the effort to be present with our parish community in whatever way you could, and that's what makes the biggest difference. They say 80% of success is simply showing up. If, of that 80%, you can only actually accomplish 1% of success, then that 1% is still 100% better than if you didn't show up at all. Showing up for one another comes in many forms, as we learn from all of our readings today. Being present for one another makes all the difference; and there's quite a wide latitude for what showing up looks like.

In the story from the Hebrew scriptures that we've been following for the past few weeks, we've been watching what showing up looks like from two perspectives. The first is how God shows up for Moses. Now, we don't know what happened in the days in between each of these exciting episodes in the Exodus narrative. We don't know what kind of conversations happened between Moses and God, or what sorts of daily interactions took place that strengthened their relationship. But we do know what happened when the Israelites found themselves in a crisis moment, and looked to their leader for a solution.

How are we going to cross the Red Sea and escape the Egyptians?  
Where is the bread we need?  
Give us water!

In all of these situations, when the people were closing in on Moses, God showed up - and acted. God was there when Moses needed it. Whatever it was in the in-between days, whereupon their relationship was built, it allowed Moses to trust completely that God would show up. We know this from last week when we read the conversation between Moses and Aaron, when Moses said, "For what are we, that [the people] complain against us?" Moses knew God would show up and make a difference. Today, we read how Moses cried out to the Lord, and how God responded with a plan. Had God not showed up when God's people needed it, this story would never have happened.

Showing up in the Exodus story isn't strictly a function of divine providence. God is not the only one who does this. Moses also takes his part in showing up. The all-powerful creator of all things could have rescued and relocated the Israelites all on God's own, but God doesn't do that. God reaches out to Moses. We know there was some hesitation on Moses' part back at the burning bush. We know also that sometimes Moses - even Moses who looked upon the very face of God - was sometimes reluctant to step into the fray when God needed him to be there. But he did it. Moses was there when God called. And Moses was there when his people needed him to be. While God may have all the confidence in creation to handle whatever situation presents itself, Moses, with whatever doubt and trepidation that plagued him, still found a way to show up also, and do what he could. And that made all the difference.

When have you found yourself in the position of needing to show up for someone else? Perhaps, like God, you knew exactly what to do, and had the presence of mind to provide the direction needed. Or perhaps you felt more like Moses, and had doubts about your ability to do what needed to be done. We know that no one can do everything, and sometimes situations call for specialized help. In those situations that call for your presence, I hope you know that you're called because you're the right person to be there. Like both God and Moses, you already come equipped with the skills and abilities that are needed in that moment. That's why your showing up is exactly the right thing to do. You will handle whatever it is with grace and effectiveness simply because you show up.

In our second reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians, we hear Paul express his desire to be part of the community in Philippi on their faith journey, whether he can be present with them in person or from a distance. You know, everything we know about Paul's mission comes to us by way of a letter Paul sent to a community where he couldn't actually be present.

In some of his letters, Paul is trying to help the community work through a crisis. In other letters, like the one today, Paul is providing the encouragement the people need to continue forward on their journey. His letters provide powerful descriptions of the people and situations of the early disciples. Much of the value of these letters is in their application to situations contemporary disciples face. At some point Christians around the world all find ourselves wondering if Paul is writing to our church today? He seems to “get” many of the things that concern us most. It’s not possible for Paul to actually be present to any of his readers, and yet his words find a way to cross distance and time and give us what we need to hear. Paul may not be physically present in the room with us, but he still manages to show up.

The ways we used to show up for one another simply cannot happen the way they used to. In some cases showing up in person is exactly the wrong thing to do! We’ve had to find new ways to be present with the people in our community - at least for the time being. Some of our community members will be able to be present with one another in the same room at the same time... sometimes. Others will be able to be present at any time, day or night... but only on the computer; or over the phone, or by a card or letter.

Thanks to Paul, we know that showing up can take the form of either physical presence or distanced communication. In many ways we’re very lucky to be experiencing things in this time, when we have access to video communication, live streaming, Zoom and other video conferencing options, as well as sending a letter. But for the children of God there’s something else.

We are all connected at a deep spiritual level, and nothing can ever really separate us. If a letter written two thousand years ago can connect us to the earliest Christians, and ancient scrolls can connect us with Moses, how much more connects us directly to God?

Jesus has a story for us in the Gospel today that continues the lesson about the importance of showing up. A father has a need in the vineyard and reaches out to his sons for help. One son talks a good line about going into the vineyard, but then doesn’t go. The other doesn’t want to go to the vineyard and says so. Extra points for honesty. Like the Exodus story, we don’t know what was going on behind the scenes - what the sons are thinking about after their father departs. All we know is that one of them responds to the need of the father and shows up in the vineyard.

Was the son that went good at vineyard work? We don’t really know. Was it for picking grapes that he was needed? Perhaps it was something more administrative. Maybe the father needed a wine taster that day. What was needed in that moment isn’t the point. The particular skill sets of the sons are beside the point. The point is that their presence was the most important thing. Whatever their strengths or abilities happened to be, they would be put to good use.

The will of the father is simply to show up. I believe God’s will for us likewise is to simply show up for one another in whatever way we can. You might think you don’t have the knowledge or skills to make a difference - we aren’t physicians who can keep people from dying. We aren’t researchers who can develop a vaccine. That doesn’t matter. The pandemic doesn’t matter. What matters is our response to the people in our community who need us. When we show up, it will be clear in what ways we can help.

In all of the examples in the lectionary readings for today, there is another commonality - the presence of God in the midst of it all. We are inextricably connected to the divine. We never need to worry if God will show up for us when we need it, because God is already here.

We are also inextricably connected to one another through Jesus Christ. We remember this each time we celebrate the Eucharist together. And in those times when we can’t, we know we’re still in communion with one another because we’ve shared the sacrament of Jesus. Nothing can change that. We demonstrate our communion whenever we reach out to one another - a phone call, a card, a Zoom coffee date, or a physically distanced gardening session, or time to pray together. We may not be able to do everything, but we can be present when we’re needed in whatever way we can. We show up for one another because others show up for us, and in the midst of it all is the ever-present love of God. That’s always made all the difference.

And that's good news.