

Just Showing Up Doesn't Get the Job Done
Matthew 25:1-13

These eight words from John Wayne have the power to change a life. John Wayne and his rough-and-tumble, heart-of-gold, good-guy character perfected on-screen never failed to embody the qualities of honor, loyalty, bravery and commitment.

In the classic movie, "Rio Bravo," Wayne's character summed up the essence of his cowboy philosophy by declaring to a less-than-perfect sidekick "Just showing up doesn't get the job done!"

Our parable this morning with 10 bridesmaids seems to emphasize the same kind of message – that it takes more than good intentions to be a faithful member of the Christian community. In fact, being a disciple of Christ requires us to commit to eight crucial words, all of which will direct the whole course of our lives if we take them seriously.

The first two of these eight words are: **Show Up**. There's a saying that says "90 percent of success is just showing up".

For a Christian, "showing up" has a God-centered meaning. The worst thing a Christian can do is fail to show up to the moment God places before us. Doesn't mean we have to like it or want it. But we do have to show up for it.

Make no mistake: This is not the world in which I would have chosen to "show up."

An airline survey found that one in three pet owners talks to his or her animal over the telephone while away from home. Another survey shares that one in four Americans believe extraterrestrials have visited Earth.

Complaints from 72 cigarette smokers in 27 states precipitated Philip Morris to recall eight billion cigarettes in 1995. The nature of the complaints? Smoking cigarettes caused sore throats, eye irritation, nose drainage, coughing, wheezing and sneezing. Hello!?

For such people as these... the lonely, confused, self-absorbed, heartsick among us...we have been called to "show up." But clearly just showing up is not enough.

Words 3 and 4 of the 8 words: **Be Present**. Anyone who has faithfully "shown up" and then blissfully slept through 8 a.m. chemistry lectures, Monday morning staff meetings, Friday afternoon faculty meetings, Sunday morning worship services knows that showing up isn't always enough.

Jesus' parable tells of bridesmaids who showed up . . . and slept. They had no "presence" of mind for the moment God had given them. Disciples of Jesus must not only show up to the world and life in which God has placed us, we must genuinely "be present" be in what the Quakers call "allthereness."

Give the moment you're in everything you've got. Give life all of yourself. Be fully in the moment. Whatever you are doing, do it with full awareness. I remember traveling through Atlanta airport years ago and noticing a coffee shop called Caribou Cafes. Their motto is simple and can be applied to this second pair of words: "Life is short. Stay awake."

Just as one of the worst things you can do while driving is to fall asleep at the wheel, one of the worst things you can do in life is to fall asleep while living. Life takes our complete concentration; it demands we become masters of an undivided attention to living.

Anything less means we're not totally alive to the moment. And if we're not totally alive to the moment that means we're somewhat dead to that moment. Make each moment full, being totally absorbed in what you're doing where you are.

Words 5 and 6 of the 8: **Be Yourself**. God calls us to "show up" and "be present" because God needs our unique gifts and strengths for this unique place and time.

God wants you to be just like you. God wants you to be who you are.

An old cowboy saying declares: "You can put a boot in the oven, but it won't come out a biscuit." Each of us must make our own biscuit from scratch using the energy, talents, skills, guts and gifts God has given us.

"Being yourself" requires that you first know who you are and that takes a lifetime of work. You don't "just grow." No one "just grows." We all grow in certain ways that God intends or doesn't intend. Into whose image will you "grow"? Will you grow into God's image and God's image for you, or will you grow into God's image for someone else and someone else's image?

As disciples of Jesus Christ we must boldly claim the unique gifts we've been blessed to have been given by our Creator. To live life by imitation – embarrassed by the gifts we have – or by mimicry – taking on other's gifts as if they're ours - can result only in failure.

Last 2 words of the 8: **Let Go**. In the Matthean parable of the ten bridesmaids, the whole point of their anxious waiting for the bridegroom, the vigilance and careful preparation of the wise maidens, is so that they can be a part of the wedding party.

The tragedy of the foolish maidens is that they miss out on the party and the joy and exuberance that comes from being in the presence of the bridegroom. God wants those invited to this party to joyously "let go" and let the Holy Spirit take control of them.

William Holmes Border, Baptist preacher from Atlanta's Wheat St. Baptist Church, likes to pray before church services start and say, "Lord, let something happen here today that's not in the bulletin."

The willingness to "let go" is hard for us. But when we do "let go" and let God take control, we are free to experience the liberating freedom from fallenness.

And once ushered into the bridegroom's presence and party, you'll never want to leave. One taste of God, even for a moment, and you will want it to last forever. Only in this supreme state of letting go can we hope to experience the ultimate peace and security of an intimate relationship with the Divine.

Just showing up doesn't get the job done. Christians need to show up, be present, be yourself, and let go.