

## Wesley United Methodist Church

November 9, 2014

"Just Showing Up Doesn't Get the Job Done."

Matthew 25:1-13

Eight words that can change your life. Cowboy culture is still dominated by the larger-than-life image projected by the greatest cowboy actor of them all, John Wayne. The rough-and-tumble, heart-of-gold, good-guy character John Wayne perfected on-screen never failed to embody the qualities of honor, loyalty, bravery, and commitment.

John Wayne's cowboys didn't just look good. They were good. In the classic, "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."

Matthew's parable of the 10 bridesmaids seems to emphasize this same kind of message to his reader. 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. These eight words will direct the whole course of our lives if we take them seriously: Show Up, Be Present, Be Yourself, Let Go.

Show up. Getting there, no matter what the speed, is not everything. But it is a lot. Who was it who first declared that "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 has given us. Jesus calls us to show up to the event God has placed us in, to show up to the problem life is presenting to us. Jesus doesn't mean we have to like it. Jesus doesn't mean we have to accept it. But Jesus does mean we must show up for the moment God has given as crazy or as hard as it is. As I mentioned before, just showing up is not enough.

Be present. Anyone who has faithfully "shown up" and then slept through 8 a.m. chemistry or calculus class, Monday morning staff meetings, Friday afternoon faculty meetings, Sunday morning worship services (!!!) knows that sometimes showing up really isn't 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 also genuinely "be present." Give your moment everything you've got. Give life all of yourself. Be fully in the moment. Whatever you are doing, do it with full awareness or, as we sometimes say, with gusto. That means staying awake and give our undivided attention to God's moment.

Be Yourself. It has always been true: Everybody wants everyone else to be just like them. However, God wants you to be just like you. God wants you to be who you are. An old cowboy saying goes like this: "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.

To "be 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 or someone else's image?

We all have been given certain gifts, and it's time for disciples of Jesus Christ to boldly claim their unique gifts. To live life by imitation can result only in failure.

Let Go. In the parable of the ten bridesmaids, the whole point of their anxious waiting for the bridegroom, the 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 on the joy that comes from being in the presence of the bridegroom. God wants all those invited to this party to joyously "let go" and let the Holy Spirit take control of them.

William Holmes Border, black Baptist preacher from Atlanta's Wheat Street Baptist Church liked to pray before church services, "Lord, let something happen here today that's not in the bulletin."

The willingness to "let go" is hard, as any parent can tell you. The wonderful surprise that God has in store for us is that when we can at last "let go" and let God take control, we do not suddenly experience some sort of stomach-squeezing free fall but a liberating freedom from letting go.

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

What would have happened if those who we celebrate and remember today never Showed Up, never Were Present, never Were Themselves, and never Let Go?