

Sermon Oct.11,2020, Matt22:1-4

Director and actor Woody Allen is known for a lot of quotes. But maybe his most famous quote is this one. Anyone want to guess what it is? “Ninety percent of life is just showing up.”

But Woody Allen is famously wrong. Ninety percent of life is what we do AFTER we show up.

Why do we want to believe Allen’s computations so badly? We eagerly embrace Woody’s calculus because it takes us off the hook for all but ten percent of our lifetime of screw-ups, fall-flats, and melt-downs. It is easy to just “be there.” It is much harder to be there for the long haul, the hard times, the big tests, the final curtain.

Just “showing up” at your wedding might get you married, but it doesn’t build a living, loving, fighting, mortgage paying, in-law juggling, overdrawn, children challenged, and lifetime relationship.

Just “showing up” at the birth of your child might make you a “parent”, but it does not make you a changing diapers, up-all-night, learning dinosaur names, cheering at rain-soaked sidelines, doing Algebra homework, enforcing curfews, saving for college, kind of Mom or Dad.

Just “showing up” at church every Sunday morning might make you a member in good-standing, but it does not automatically put feet on your faith. The Theologian G. K. Chesterton used to say that “Just going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than standing in your garage makes you a car.” To be a Christian takes action; it takes a day-to-day commitment to follow Jesus wherever he leads.

In Jesus’ wedding banquet parable there are two “listen up” messages. First, those on the specially invited “guest list” reject their invitation, rudely, cruelly, ultimately murderously. Jesus is addressing his parable to a particularly rude, then cruel, then finally murderous audience—the religious authorities in Jerusalem who were opposing his presence and were vigorously trying to maintain and protect the status quo.

The chief priests were completely committed to the continuation of the temple and its lucrative administration-daily sacrifices, the temple hierarchy, rituals, routines. The Pharisees were committed to a different kind of routine—a routinized, morality, prescribed by a devotion to the details of the written Torah. Neither group could find a way to respond outside3 their chosen boundaries to Jesus’ message and mission. Neither group could accept the boundaries to Jesus’ message and mission. Neither group could accept the possibility that there might be Truth outside of their deeply rutted trajectories.

In Jesus’ parable of the wedding banquet the first group of invitees reject their invitation. In fact, they do more than reject the invitation. The “kill the messenger” that brings them their invitation. Their refusal to join in the “party” is complete and curtained.

The next group of invitees expands to include ALL. Everyone who hears about the wedding party is invited to attend. BUT, with the invitation there comes expectation. Not of perfection.

Not of excellence. Not of economic ability. Not of exceptional giftedness. The exception is that each guest will acknowledge their entry into this new place, the “wedding banquet,” this waiting room for a new future, **by making some changes in themselves.**

In the parable, the “change” required is in clothing. In the life of faith the “change” required is not a change of clothes but a change of mind. A change of heart. A change of spirit.

We see in this parable that God is the King who is inviting us to the wedding banquet. We are all invited, whether the world judges us to be “good” or “bad”, rich or poor, worthy or unworthy. The invitation is without restrictions. But that does NOT mean that the invitation is without expectations.

It DOES mean that we are all granted full admission to the kingdom of God through the gracious “free pass” offered by Christ. But there are requirements. We cannot remain unchanged. We cannot keep wearing the same world-weary “clothes” of indifference, prejudice, hatred, judgment, cruelty, coldness that we sported before walking into the wedding banquet. We are required, by the grace of God, by the grace of the one who invited us, to “spruce up”, for the party. For a seat in God’s kingdom, “sprucing up” doesn’t take cash or charisma. It takes a commitment to changing something more than what is skin deep.

God ENJOYS us. But God also **ENJOINS** us to act as missional members of the kingdom. We are welcome with open arms. Yet we are enjoined to put our arms into “as-it-is-in-heaven” action.

Another words, it is not enough just to “show-up..” The God of all creation enjoins us to create, to bear fruit, to give back, to pay forward, to change, ourselves and to change the world. It is true that the first things we have to do is “show up.” **But** that is just the beginning of our new lives.

No, the chief priests and Pharisees were not evil. They were not inherently bad. They were, however, stuck in a rut. They believed that their way was **The way to establish a righteous relationship with God. The problem with both of those “ways” is that they were artificial paths that missed the truth.**

**Sometimes an alternative pathway seems so convincing. For substance abuse addicts the pathway to peace and fulfillment seems to be met by an artificial “high.” When the drug of choices is gone, so is the feeling of completion and accomplishment. Even further, anything that creates unhealthy dependency, whether it be computers, texting, Facebook, twitter, artificial relationships..the list goes on and on, but the key is what it does to your own and special humanness from God.**

**To “get clean” from any of these artificial dependencies requires a period of “drying out,” completely cutting oneself off from the addictive behavior. “Drying out” enables those caught in such webs to reassess and realize what are the truly positive things in their lives.**

In Christianity the equivalent of addiction might be called “churchism.” It was the addiction Jesus was addressing in the chief priests and pharisees in his Jerusalem preaching. It was not that these religious that these religious leaders were not trying to do and be good. The problem was that they had completely identified the “good” with the “process.” Instead of the person, they trusted Torah and Temple over the living presence of God in their midst. Twenty-one centuries later our problems remain pretty much the same. We love our church families, we love our church work, we love our churches place in the community, we love our position on committees. But for some us we are “addicted” to the artifices of “the Church,” and not committed to the kingdom. We are at the banquet, but we are not wearing our “wedding robes.”

It is easy to become addicted, to become dependent upon the artificial “substances” of organization, or hierarchies, or social acceptance, of prestige, that are all available by being a “good” member in standing.

Kicking that dependency doesn’t take “drying out.” Instead it takes a Christ centered “watering up,” a renewed commitment to drinking deep of the true loving water that is Jesus Christ. The cure for unhealthy dependency is to dry out. The cure for churchism is to water up.

Christ is the living water, the real thing. We may all drink deeply of Christ without fear of becoming addicted to something else. As a full; participant in the banquet of the kingdom we will both enjoy the presence of God and will experience the fulfillment that comes from participating in the procession of that kingdom on earth and in heaven.

God enjoys us and first and foremost wants all of us to come to the banquet. But God also enjoins us to bring something to the party. Bring ourselves-bring our songs, our stories, our possibilities, our probabilities. We have been invited to do nothing less than change the world through the power of Christ. Amen