

Legacy: 2. Showing Up
Philippians 2:1-5
June 3, 2018
Pastor Steve Richards

We never forget our high school graduation. Here's a photo of younger me. [photo] Maybe it's a good thing, the photo is out of focus – note the shoulder length hair and pink bow tie! Over the years, schools have changed and courses may have changed, but commencement ceremonies haven't really changed. Your name is called with loud cheers as you walk across the stage. You shake hands with the principal or the superintendent and you are given a diploma. You stop for the photo, smile, and then joy. You made it! 18 years and you made it! You just hope they remembered to sign your diploma. What's the number one question asked of high school graduates? It's not "what are you doing this fall?" That's number two. Number one is "What do you want to do with your life?" As if we really knew! But this morning, I want to suggest something greater than what college or what career any of us might choose. Something that will help those who are coming behind you win – regardless of where you are in life.

Think about your life for a moment: Who are the people who showed up in your life? I don't think any of us get to where we are all by ourselves. Who showed up for you? If we're honest, the reason you are here today is because someone showed up for you. You are here because someone showed up at an intersection in life. Someone showed up and gave you a second chance. Someone gave you a job or some opportunity. Somewhere along the way someone influenced your life and you are where you are because of them. If someone's name comes to mind, write down that person's name and be thankful for them. None of us are where we are all by ourselves.

Your best chance to have influence in someone's life is to actually show up. You have to be present before you can make a difference in their life. Yesterday, we had a memorial service for Leonard Lindelof. He was a member of this church in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s. He died a week ago at the age of 92. At the service his nephew and his grandchildren (10 of them) shared remembrances and the common theme was kindness and generosity. That's the way everyone who was here seemed to experience him. At one point more than 100 persons raised their hands to indicate they were the recipients of some act of kindness from Len. When the service had ended, Len's next door neighbor approached me and said, Len once told him why he spent his life being kind to others. It was one act of kindness as a child that changed the rest of his life. He was riding the school bus and there was a girl on the bus who was "plump" – and other kinds would make fun of her until she cried. One day, he went home and talk to his brother about what he could do, and the next day when this girl got on the bus he said, "Good morning, little miss sunshine." And then he stood up on the bus and said to everyone, "This is little miss sunshine" and he sat down next to her. She was never again teased on the bus. That act of kindness changed his life and it changed little miss sunshine. In fact her mother told that story at church one Sunday and there was another girl who heard the story and wanted to meet the boy who did this. 70 years later they celebrated their 70s wedding anniversary. And yesterday the next generation and the generation after that were living that legacy – all as a result of a single act of kindness. How do we help the people coming behind us? My message this morning is very simple – we show up.

And when you care enough to show up, to be present, really present in someone's life. When they know they matter to you. When they know what matters to them matters to you. When they know they matter more to you than what you believe – there's a word for this: EMPATHY. It is a word that holds the key to a lot of issues that this nation faces. This word is why some groups do or do

not get along. It's the reason why some parents and kids don't get along. Empathy is pausing long enough to hear someone else's story. It is putting our own thoughts, ideas, beliefs on hold. It is pressing pause long enough to listen and to understand somebody else – what they feel and what they think and what they experience.

A few months ago, Amanda was overcharged for parking in a ramp in Minneapolis and she returned the next day to get the \$20 credited back on her credit card. She was told the person she needed to see, and so she went to that person, explained the situation, and asked for the refund and when the person said she could not do that – Amanda replied that she had been told that woman could do it. And suddenly the woman burst into tears. All Amanda wanted was \$20 refunded. She had asked respectfully and now the woman in front of her was so distraught she could not even speak. And as Amanda waited, the woman apologized and then described how she had just received a message that her 3 year old nephew had been killed. And Amanda listened and offered prayer and then sent me a message asking our prayer chain to pray for this woman and her family. And Amanda returned a few days later to check on this woman – a total stranger. But pausing long enough to hear.

Brene Brown says that empathy is communicating that incredibly healing message: You are not alone. When someone falls into a deep hole and cries, "I'm stuck. It's dark, I'm overwhelmed." We don't say, "That looks bad" and then throw them a sandwich. Empathy is climbing down into the hole and saying, "I know what it's like down here. You are not alone." Empathy is not making things better but making a connection.

We meet people every day who have something in the background that affects what they think and how they act and we don't know and sometimes you have to pause. What would happen if we didn't jump to conclusions or make assumptions about someone until we paused long enough to know someone. There is a risk. It might end up costing us something. How many of us have greeted someone by saying "how are you doing?" when we had no intention of waiting for the answer. In fact, we kept walking and never heard the answer. And if someone said, "I'm stuck. It's dark. I'm overwhelmed" would we pause? What if it was a total stranger?

We have been given a model of someone who willingly stepped into someone else's world to understand. God sent Jesus into our world precisely so we would know that God knows how we feel. And we would have a model. Here's the description of that model from Philippians 2: **Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.** Put your own interests on pause. Why? So you can see the interests of others. This could resolve a lot of issues in relationships, at work, on the team. Pause my interests long enough to hear. **In your relationships with one another, have the same attitude of mind Christ Jesus had.** Think like Jesus so it shapes how you see other people. What did Jesus do? When he entered the city of Jericho and noticed a man named Zacchaeus watching from a tree – unlike everyone else who had already judged him – Jesus went into his home – something no one had done, no one would ever dream of doing – Jesus went into his home, paused long enough to hear his story – and that was enough to change Zacchaeus' life. Or the time Jesus discovered a crowd preparing to kill a woman who was caught in an act of adultery. They were ready to throw the stone and the law gave them the permission to do it. But Jesus did not condemn her – he paused long enough to listen. There are people all around us who have yet to find someone who is safe enough and will pause long enough. Empathy.

That's precisely what I wish I knew that day I walked across the stage to receive my diploma. I thought my life was all about me. A week ago, I asked the question: What would you tell your 18

year old self? *“Value others above yourself,” one person said. Don’t value yourself or others by how they look or what they wear. Value yourself and others by how you live. She went on to say: Next year I will have my 50th high school reunion. There is one person more than any other I hope to see. His name is Dan. I worked with him my junior year in high school. We could talk for hours. I knew he liked me but we both knew I would never go out with him as we did not travel in the same circles. He was very smart, very thin, gangly and he had a rather bad complexion. One day he offered me a ride home but instead of heading to my house he headed in the opposite direction. He said he was “kidnapping” me. I was concerned. He took me over to his friend’s house. A 19 or 20 year old boy named Michael who had muscular dystrophy and was wheelchair bound. Dan wanted me to meet him. Dan would visit him every day and play chess and cards with him. I had no idea.*

During our senior final exams someone brought Dan a message. Michael was in the hospital and was not doing well. Dan ran out of the room and stayed at the hospital missing the exams and graduation but remaining with Michael until he passed away. I have never seen Dan since. I want so badly to tell him that he knew what was important. He knew what mattered. He knew then what I wish I had. He knew how to show up. To value others above himself.

What do you want to do with the rest of your life? Here’s what I hope– it’s why God sent Jesus into this world – it’s called empathy - to pause long enough to hear each other’s story. It’s valuing others above self. It may not result in a higher standard of living but you will experience a higher standard for living. In all the times I’ve been with persons at the end of life – no one has ever said – I wish I had made more money. I wish I had taken more time for relationships. To pause and listen.

Grow, Pray, Study for Week of June 3, 2018

Weekly Prayer: Renew us again, dear Friend. Come alongside us and speak words of grace and truth to us. Open our eyes to your constant presence and remind us that you are always ready to empower us. You made us to receive love and to give love. May your love be reflected in all our interactions with others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Monday, June 4

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-27

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that he had to be killed and raised on the third day. Then Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him: "God forbid, Lord! This won't happen to you." But he turned to Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God's thoughts but human thoughts."

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them. Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives? For the Human One is about to come with the majesty of his Father with his angels. And then he will repay each one for what that person has done.

Observation: When Jesus told his closest followers that he faced death on the cross, Peter (the most outspoken disciple) tried to talk Jesus out of the idea. Instead, Jesus “doubled down,” telling Peter that he called ALL his followers to “take up their cross.” What would be the point, he asked,

of pursuing earthly wealth or prestige in ways that gave up God's offer of life in eternity? "Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives?"

Application: Peter, like almost all first-century Jews, expected a conquering Messiah, a figure of intimidating power. That made it hard for him to understand Jesus' words about self-sacrifice. What assumptions about life, success and greatness do you have that make it harder for you to accept Jesus' teaching about a truly great life legacy? What has helped your thinking to reach beyond those inherited cultural assumptions?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, so many voices tell me that avoiding pain and sacrifice is the way to a good life. Your call to leave a legacy is highly counter-cultural. Let my lesser self die, so that a greater self, shaped by you, may be born. Amen.

Tuesday, June 5

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-28

"The kingdom of heaven is like a man who was leaving on a trip. He called his servants and handed his possessions over to them. To one he gave five valuable coins, and to another he gave two, and to another he gave one. He gave to each servant according to that servant's ability. Then he left on his journey. "After the man left, the servant who had five valuable coins took them and went to work doing business with them. He gained five more. In the same way, the one who had two valuable coins gained two more. But the servant who had received the one valuable coin dug a hole in the ground and buried his master's money. "Now after a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five valuable coins came forward with five additional coins. He said, 'Master, you gave me five valuable coins. Look, I've gained five more.' "His master replied, 'Excellent! You are a good and faithful servant! You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.' "The second servant also came forward and said, 'Master, you gave me two valuable coins. Look, I've gained two more.' "His master replied, 'Well done! You are a good and faithful servant. You've been faithful over a little. I'll put you in charge of much. Come, celebrate with me.' "Now the one who had received one valuable coin came and said, 'Master, I knew that you are a hard man. You harvest grain where you haven't sown. You gather crops where you haven't spread seed. So I was afraid. And I hid my valuable coin in the ground. Here, you have what's yours.' "His master replied, 'You evil and lazy servant! You knew that I harvest grain where I haven't sown and that I gather crops where I haven't spread seed? In that case, you should have turned my money over to the bankers so that when I returned, you could give me what belonged to me with interest. Therefore, take from him the valuable coin and give it to the one who has ten coins.

Observation: The "coins" in this story were valuable indeed. The Greek word is *talanton*, often translated as 'talent,' which refers to a monetary unit equal to more than 16 years of earnings for a laborer. But Jesus focused less on the amount of money and more on how faithful each servant was or wasn't. He said our faithfulness to God shows in our willingness to use whatever resources of energy, time, skills, money or other assets God gives us to leave a legacy of blessing others and building God's kingdom.

Application: The apostle Paul wrote about his own direction and purpose in life, "What is expected of a manager is that they prove to be faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:1-4). To the Galatians, he wrote that living selfishly destroys our freedom, and serving each other in love is the divine remedy for selfishness (Galatians 5:13-14). How are you using your resources to serve God and bless others? Are there any resources or life-giving abilities you have "buried?" If so, how might you begin to use them actively for God's purposes?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I admit that sometimes I'd like to keep the resources you entrust to me all for myself. Teach me daily more about what it means for me to be good and faithful. Amen.

Wednesday, June 6

Scripture: Matthew 25:31-45

"Now when the Human One comes in his majesty and all his angels are with him, he will sit on his majestic throne. All the nations will be gathered in front of him. He will separate them from each other, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right side. But the goats he will put on his left. "Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.' "Then those who are righteous will reply to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' "Then the king will reply to them, 'I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.' "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Get away from me, you who will receive terrible things. Go into the unending fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. I was hungry and you didn't give me food to eat. I was thirsty and you didn't give me anything to drink. I was a stranger and you didn't welcome me. I was naked and you didn't give me clothes to wear. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.' "Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and didn't do anything to help you?' Then he will answer, 'I assure you that when you haven't done it for one of the least of these, you haven't done it for me.'

Observation: People so poor they don't have enough to eat or wear, who can't afford good (or any) care if they're sick, who are in prison, who are outsiders in your community—most of us are willing to do a little something to help them. Jesus called such people "these brothers and sisters of mine." To truly embrace God's renewing work in the world means seeing that the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the aliens are not "them"—they're "us." Jesus calls us to build a legacy of doing his work as one human family, bound by mutual caring and sharing.

Application: In this parable, the king surprised both the sheep and the goats. The goats' question (verse 44) meant, "If we'd known it was you, of course we would have helped." But the hungry, hurting, outcast people they ignored, maybe every day, weren't like Jesus—weren't worth helping. What can give you eyes to see the face of Jesus in the faces of all those you meet, especially those who are outcast or hurting? When have you found the freedom and joy that comes from showing up and being the godly presence that is needed in this world?

Prayer: O God, keep my eyes and my heart open to see your face in the faces of hurting people around me who need your touch through me. Amen.

Thursday, June 7

Scripture: Acts 20:17-37

From Miletus he sent a message to Ephesus calling for the church's elders to meet him. When they arrived, he said to them, "You know how I lived among you the whole time I was with you, beginning with the first day I arrived in the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears in the midst of trials that came upon me because of the Jews' schemes. You know I held back nothing that would be helpful so that I could proclaim to you and teach you both publicly and privately in your homes. You know I have testified to both Jews and Greeks that they must change their hearts and lives as they turn to God and have faith in our Lord Jesus. Now, compelled by the Spirit, I'm going to Jerusalem. I don't know what will happen to me there. What I do know is that the Holy Spirit testifies to me from city to city that prisons and troubles await me. But nothing, not even my life, is more important than my completing my mission. This is nothing other than the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus: to testify about the good news of God's grace. "I know that none of you will see me again—you among whom I traveled and proclaimed the kingdom. Therefore, today I testify to you that I'm not responsible for anyone's fate. I haven't avoided proclaiming the entire plan of God to you. Watch yourselves and the whole flock, in which the Holy Spirit has placed you as supervisors, to shepherd God's church, which he obtained with the death of his own Son. I know that, after my departure, savage wolves will come in among you and won't spare the flock. Some of your own people will distort the word in order to lure followers after them. Stay alert! Remember that for three years I constantly and tearfully warned each one of you. I never stopped warning you! Now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all whom God has made holy. I haven't craved anyone's silver, gold, or clothing. You yourselves know that I have provided for my own needs and for those of my companions with my own hands. In everything I have shown you that, by working hard, we must help the weak. In this way we remember the Lord Jesus' words: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" After he said these things, he knelt down with all of them to pray. They cried uncontrollably as everyone embraced and kissed Paul.

Observation: Paul was traveling to Jerusalem, carrying an offering from Greek Christians who were eager to help their needy fellow Christians in Jerusalem. But Paul knew it was likely that arrest and prison awaited him in Jerusalem. In an emotional farewell to the elders in Ephesus, he reviewed his legacy of ministry among them, connected it to Jesus' self-giving legacy and sketched the tasks he trusted them to carry on when he was gone.

Application: Do you know what your life mission and purpose is? Many do not. Paul's words in verse 24 can help you begin to identify that purpose. What is there in your life that would move you to say, "Nothing is more important than _____"? As that answer comes into focus, pray about whether it fits better into God's definition of a good life legacy, or that of the society around you. Ask God to help you make any needed course corrections.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide me into the kind of life after which I can say, like Paul, "I served the Lord with great humility.... I held back nothing that would be helpful." Amen.

Friday, June 8

Scripture: Mark 14:3-9

While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, "Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year's wages and the money given to the poor." And they rebuked her harshly. "Leave her alone," said Jesus. "Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can

help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Observation: Mark reported that a grateful woman anointed Jesus with very expensive perfume in the last week of his life. Some criticized her striking act of gratitude, but Jesus staunchly defended her. He knew he was on his way to the cross, said she had anointed him in advance of his burial, and by her gift created a legacy that would echo all the way to 2018 and beyond.

Application: Imagine the deep love and gratitude that moved the woman to offer Jesus this extravagant gift. What does Jesus’ response tell you about how much her fervent love meant to him as he faced death? How can you show your love for Jesus, both inwardly in your spiritual relationship with him and outwardly, with acts of mercy to those whom you meet?

Prayer: Loving Lord, she wasn’t trying to impress us, or the people in the room with you. She just wanted urgently to say “Thank you” for your love and grace. Help the same profound gratitude to motivate any of my acts of service to you and others. Amen.

Saturday, June 9

Scripture: John 14:21-27

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. “All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Observation: What could a rabbi who owned no property and faced execution the next day possibly leave his followers? With evil people plotting and Easter’s light visible only in faith and hope, Jesus told his followers that he was leaving them his peace. The gift rested on the Holy Spirit’s presence with them, “not as the world gives.” If they could grasp it firmly, they could find Jesus’ peace even at times of great fear. It proved to be a powerful, timeless legacy, one that could reach even into the dark corners of a Roman prison where the apostle Paul was held (Philippians 4:4-13). It sustained the hearts of his followers through difficult times ahead.

Application: In his commentary, William Barclay wrote, “The peace which the world offers us is the peace of escape, the peace which comes from the avoidance of trouble and from refusing to face things. The peace which Jesus offers us is the peace of conquest. No experience of life can ever take it from us and no sorrow, no danger, no suffering can ever make it less. It is independent of outward circumstances.” Are there dark places of fear and anxiety in your life today? In what ways have you found the peace that Jesus gives to be different from the types of peace that the world offers?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for offering me a peace that isn’t temporary, that nothing can take away from me. Please help me to live into that peace more each day. Amen.