

Sermon for October 16, 2022 by The Rev. Lydia Gajdel
Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost Year C
St. Paul and the Redeemer Episcopal Church – Chicago, Illinois

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Mother of us all.

I was ten years old and about to embark on one of the most terrorizing journeys of my short life, middle school. All of my friends were going to one middle school and I had decided to attend a different school. Alone. Without a social safety net or any context with which to navigate this impending gauntlet. I was terrified. But, I was also strategic.

My sister had been begging my parents for a dog for years and every time she had broached the subject she had swiftly been shut down. Eventually she just gave up. But young as I was, I knew that I had been given an opportunity that I would be remiss to waste. So I sat down at my desk, grabbed a pencil and piece of loose leaf paper and composed one of the greatest works of persuasion this world has ever seen.

The letter to my parents detailed my impending plight. I was going to a brand new school with no friends. I just needed someone to come home to who would be excited to see me and love me and wouldn't a dog be the perfect companion as I enter such a lonely period of my life.

Was it over the top? Excessively.
Did it get the job done? Almost.

Sure, they said. You can get a dog, but if you want this dog you have to take care of it. So, we packed up and headed to Barnes and Nobles in search of a how-to guide for expectant dog owners. When I finished my book, I was told, we could go to the Animal Rescue League and look for a dog. Given my task, I headed to my room and I read. And I read. And I read. I stayed up all night and in the morning I met my parents at their bedside at 6:00AM with a summary of the book in hand wondering what time the rescue opened. I can

only imagine what my poor parents were feeling as I stood over them, delirious from sleeplessness and anticipation, as they realized that they had come to a crossroads, and we were about to get a dog.

This story is often used in my adulthood as an illustration of my tenacity. This is a truth about me, but I also think that I was just an obnoxious ten-year-old learning a truth about being human. It wasn't that I was particularly adamant, but more that my sister and I showed up enough times in annoying enough ways that eventually the stars aligned and it worked. Which feels pretty universal. I'm sure we all have a story or two about putting ourselves in the right place the right amount of times and getting what we want or what we need.

That's part of why I love our gospel for today. The characters in Jesus's parable are just soooo human and we are invited to learn something about ourselves and our God by facing that humanity.

On one hand, we have the widow. The most marginalized member of society in Jesus's day, the widow takes what power she can muster and becomes absolutely obnoxious for the sake of justice. She knows what she needs and she keeps showing up to get it, even as she is continuously turned away. She doesn't shrink in the face of might but rather brings her whole self to take up space and fight for what she deserves.

On the other hand, we have the judge. While he's not the one we should be rooting for, I respect his honesty. He literally says, I don't care about God. I don't care about people. But man oh man, is this old lady annoying. He gives her what she wants simply to get her out of his hair.

Luke's gospel is full of these parables with not so great humans falling backwards into doing the right thing. The bad parents who wouldn't even give their kids scorpions to eat. The dishonest manager who cheats his boss by giving back to the poor. This judge who protects the vulnerable because he got irritated. In all of these stories, we are invited to learn something about the goodness of our God by watching fallible humans sorta get it right.

Today we have a lesson in showing up. Over and over and over again. We as Christians have had a tendency to distance ourselves from God, to paint a picture of a deity who is benevolent and loving and also wholly other. An old man in the sky kind of God. Today Jesus is reminding us that prayer and faith are all about relationship. And our relationship with God is bi-directional. Prayer is not laying down a list of requests at the feet of God and shyly shrinking away. It is showing up. It is naming what we need. It is asking God to show up too. Because that is what true relationship is, the true relationship that God is inviting us into constantly. But in order to do that, we cannot hide behind fear. We can't hide behind the what ifs and the I'm not worth its. Relationship requires risk and it requires vulnerability. Because we can't get what we need if we only show up part way. If we only tell half truths about who we are and what we stand for.

The widow is a beautiful, human example of what it means to show up. Over and over and over again. Because she believes that she is worth it and what she needs is worth it and ultimately that the judge will grant her what is right. She is an example of how we are being called to show up. Messy as it may be. Seeking what is good and right from a just God.

When Bob Moses died last summer, his obituary ran in the pages of the New York Times, but I wouldn't be surprised if few here knows who I'm talking about. Moses was teaching high school Algebra as he watched the Civil Rights Movement strengthened across the south from a far. When he could no longer sit idly, he picked up his life and moved from New York City to Mississippi in the early 1960's, where he quietly became one of the most impactful leaders of the

movement alongside the Rev. Martin Luther King and John Lewis. Moses registered thousands of black voters and trained a generation of organizers in makeshift freedom schools across the state. Through his leadership, he garnered a reputation for extraordinary calm in the face of the chaos and violence that enveloped him. And as the notoriety grew and his leadership turned to fame, Moses stepped down from his roles at the Council of Federated Organizations and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and returned to the classroom. He went on to develop The Algebra Project, an organization and teaching philosophy focused on equipping students of color with math literacy skills as a necessity for the advancement of their communities towards equity. As you read one version of the story of Bob Moses's life in the annals of the Times, a theme rises to the surface. A consistent dedication to building up those around him, to standing in the uncomfortable in between and declaring that the world can be and do better, a perseverance in the face of injustice and a trust that showing up matters.

I can't paint you a picture of what this looks like for you. Each one of us is called to show up in a different way. But what I am here to do today is remind you that showing up matters. That resolve in the face of injustice and uncertainty matters. That you are called to bring all of your messy, squishy, beautiful self to this world. Show up. And keep showing up. Over and over and over again. And God promises that she will meet us there.

Amen.