



North Shore
Congregational
Church

FOX POINT, WI

From the Pulpit...

“The Face of Faith: Showing Up”

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching

Hebrews 10: 19-25; Matthew 25: 31-40

October 12, 2025

I want you to think back on some of the darker chapters of your life – those times when circumstances seemed particularly harsh and that sense of hope and expectation was increasingly fleeting in your days. Think back to those times when you lost a loved one, or struggled with illness, or battled addiction, or faced job losses and/or financial strains... I don't mean to get too heavy here – as that's far from my point – but look back upon those times and think of those people who helped you through. Picture the faces – remember the names – of those who were your anchors amidst the trials. For most, I bet, there's a pretty ready connection. For most, I imagine you can think back to that circumstance and it's not hard to come up with a list of those who were particularly meaningful to your endeavor to fight through.

Now, think about what they did. Try to remember, specifically, the things they said or the actions they took that got you through. For some of you, the clarity is still there – you remember not only who it was, but precisely what they did. For some, however, it's a little cloudier – you remember who it was, but you don't quite remember what they did. Some of you are recalling specific statements of hope and comfort, or specific deeds of compassion, that helped you through – others not so much. The truth, however, is that every single one of those people whom we are remembering had one thing in common. Whether we can recall what they said or not – whether we know the words that came out of their mouths or not – every person that we think back to as those who helped bring some light into our moments of darkness has one thing in common – they showed up! And that, for me, us the underlying lesson often missed in the familiar words of Jesus in Matthew 25.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37 Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that

we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40 And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’

A brief reset for those who may not be up to speed – we’re in the midst of this fall series that are based on comments that I received on Facebook to a simple question I posted coming into our Commissioning Sunday service on September 7. I asked people to name what faith ‘looks like,’ and I was taken not only by some of the responses I didn’t see, but some that I did. Today’s was one of those. To the question of what faith looks like, one person replied that faith looks like, “showing up, even when it’s hard and you really don’t want to.” That one, I’ll admit, really grabbed on to me.

There’s a moment in the movie *Hardball*, from 2001, in which the coach (played by Keanu Reeves) is looking at his ragtag little league team that has battled extraordinary hurdles to reach this particular point of the story and he says, “One of the most important things in life is showing up.” He goes on from there to talk about how those kids have shown up amidst trials and tribulations most of us could not imagine, but in reading that statement on Facebook, that scene sprang to mind because I’m not sure how readily we recognize that in faith, as in life, one of the most important things is showing up.

It’s a classic and well-known lesson that Jesus gives in Matthew 25 as he equates those in need with himself – making clear that each act of compassion shared with life’s less fortunate is an act of faith as though we’re doing it for Jesus himself. What I find interesting in the context of our conversation today, however, is the litany of things that are named. Feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, visiting the ill and imprisoned... There’s this long list that Jesus provides in trying to make his point and there’s a danger, I think, in the listener becoming overwhelmed. Probably for those who heard it at the time, and most certainly for us today, the idea of doing all of those things, for all of those people around us who are experiencing such challenges, can send our hearts and minds spinning. How are we supposed to feed, and water, and clothe, and welcome, and visit, and... and... and...? There’s a risk of taking that framework as something of a literal prescription for Christian behavior that can seem all but unattainable to those of us living in the real world.

What I want to suggest, however, is that we can look through the potentially overwhelming list of ‘to-dos’ that might emerge from this passage and see a more fundamental point from Jesus that goes right back to where our reflections this morning began. Despite how I think this passage can make us feel, I truly don’t believe that Jesus was saying that a Christian needs to be all things to all people. He wasn’t telling them – nor is he telling us – that we should do this, and this, and this, and this... What I really think Jesus is saying here that we need to show up to the moment that’s in front of us – whatever that may be. Jesus wasn’t saying that everyone needs to be all of those things – Jesus was saying that each and every one of those people showed up to the need that was before them, and the message that carries across the centuries is that we need to do the same.

The undeniable reality of our 21st century American culture is that it is easier than ever to withdraw into our little cocoons and leave the world to its own devices. We talked about the

comfort and safety of 'the boat' last week, but the truth is that that's just one of a plethora of influences that plague our lives and drive us into our increasingly isolated corners of existence. Communications technology has created a situation where what was once said to be an opportunity for connection is the very reason for our isolation. The work-from-home era has us sitting in our basements in front of a computer monitor 40 hours a week. The evolution of shopping and dining is such that we have no need to go out for anything anymore. (Both of our girls are at colleges where they can order food and have it robotically delivered to their front door by what is essentially a computerized hot box on wheels.)

I could go on with these for quite a while – if you haven't yet encountered any of the information out there about the potentially cataclysmic epidemic of loneliness and isolation in the younger men of our country, take a look at it sometime. My point, however, is that our societal norms and influences are increasingly pushing us in directions that result in us not wanting to show up! It might be laziness, it might be fatigue, it might be disinterest, it might be fear, or anxiety, or confusion, or anger, or hatred, or judgment, or any of about a 1,000 different things, but the simple and unavoidable reality is that there are countless forces that might cause us to not want to show up, all while Jesus is trying to get us to understand that showing up is where our faith truly begins to take its shape.

"Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds," we read in Hebrews, 'not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.' In other words? We need to show up! 'Even when it's hard and we don't want to,' we need to show up! To the hungry, or the thirsty, or the naked, or the ill, or the imprisoned, or the outcast, or the shunned, or the dismissed, or the neglected, or the disillusioned, or the grieving, or the lonely, or... No matter how hard... no matter how much we may not want to... the living of our faith begins with showing up.

When we look back upon the difficult moments and chapters in our lives, it's not hard to think of those people – those dear and blessed people – who helped us through to the other side. Sometimes, it was a kind word or a critical piece of advice. Sometimes, it was a helping hand or a little boost to get us going. Sometimes, it was a shoulder to cry on or a hand to hold. Many times, we don't even remember quite what they said or did. What they all had in common, however, is that they were there! They showed up! Into our darkness – into our pain – into our strife – they showed up to walk alongside, and when we climbed out of the darkness, we could see that they were the ones who helped us through.

Societal norms and influences are increasingly pushing us in directions that result in us not wanting to show up! It might be laziness, it might be fatigue, it might be disinterest, it might be fear, or anxiety, or confusion, or anger, or hatred, or judgment, or any of about a 1,000 different things, but the simple and unavoidable reality is that there are countless forces that might cause us to not want to show up, all while Jesus is trying to get us to understand that showing up is where our faith truly begins to take its shape. 'Even when it's hard and we don't want to,' we need to show up! To the hungry, or the thirsty, or the naked, or the ill, or the imprisoned, or the outcast, or the shunned, or the dismissed, or the neglected, or the disillusioned, or the grieving, or the lonely, or... No matter how hard... no matter how much we may not want to... the living of our faith begins with showing up.

