

***“Together, the Courage to Show Up”***

Summer Sermon Series on FEARLESS FAITH  
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA  
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, June 26, 2016  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

*Holy Scriptures: Genesis 12: 1-8*

***Together, the Courage to Show Up***

We who are on this side of the canonization of the Bible  
know the results, the end story,  
how the story of Abraham and Sarah plays out.  
We know that God called them to show up,  
to step out on faith,  
to have the courage to go forth into a new land  
with only themselves and their faith in the Lord God,  
to trust that their call would hold true.  
We can draw strength that the story ended well.  
God called, they responded,  
and their descendents were as vast and wide, as plentiful and amazing  
as the stars of the sky and the sands of the desert.  
Now, these two folks were getting on in years,  
and no one would have blamed Abram and Sarai if they had said,  
“Uh, Lord, have you considered Bubba down the road?  
He seems to have plenty of time on his hand.”  
Even if the Lord had asked Bubba first, or got around to it later,  
Abram and Sarai showed up.

Now we who are on the other side of our pasts  
can look back at our own lives and draw strength as well.  
We can and shall contemplate whom God called to show up for us,  
to be an angel of mercy and strength in our times of need.

When has someone shown up for you?

A couple years ago Jay Norton and David Andrew  
were out in our Church Park and Playground repairing park benches.  
Jay was painting a bench when a 4-year-old walked by with his mother.  
The child asked his mom what the men were doing.  
She explained their work to him, and then they moved on.  
A few minutes later the boy came back  
and said to Jay, *“I see you are still at it.”*  
*“Yes, sir,”* said Jay.  
The boy said, *“If you need any help, let me know.”*  
He pointed to the park’s red swing set and said, *“I’ll be right over there.”*  
If and when needed, he was ready to show up.

When has someone shown up for you?  
What was that like?

What difference did it make that someone came and was present for you,  
that he or she had your back,  
that the simple act of being around and in the vicinity  
gave you the courage you needed, that you thought you  
lacked,

to get through whatever was going down?  
We call this a ministry of presence.

My wife Betty is on the regional staff of the  
Christian Church in Georgia.

She serves 65 or so local congregations  
and helps to relate the General Church and the local church to each other.  
She was taught in staff orientation that in regional ministry,  
being present is important.

Being present in the lives of one another is  
vital. Essential. Invaluable. Sacred. Holy.

Show up.

Be around.

Be aware.

Be there for churches and communities, your friends and family and neighbors  
in need.

Remember, the question ever before our congregation is not, "Who is my  
neighbor?"

We know that answer.

Piece of cake! Ask us another!

The question God drops into our laps every day is, "What does my neighbor  
need?"

The answer is found by listening and watching,  
perceiving and caring, by desiring to seeing Jesus in one another.

### ***Together, the Courage to Show Up***

So, my friends, one day you were in need,

you needed someone to be present for you,

and lo and behold she or he did.

Someone showed up. For you.

Someone showed up for you.

Someone saw the Christ in you and cared for you, body and soul.

When have you benefited from someone else's ministry of presence?

Was it like having a guardian angel with some skin on it?

Who was that?

What precipitated that need, and how was it met?

How did you feel when the angel of God's mercy showed up,

and did your spine get straighter and stronger

and your knees knock a little less

and your feet feel like they were once again on solid

ground?

Suddenly you were no longer alone.

You and your guardian angel were together.

Together we are stronger.

Together we put up a united front.

Together we have each other's back, and stand side by side,

hand in hand.

***Together, the Courage to Show Up***

Rabbi Abraham Heschel taught at Jewish Theological Seminary  
and wrote books now considered classics, books on the prophets and the  
Sabbath.

One day a young rabbinical student  
went with Rabbi Abraham Heschel on a pastoral call.  
A family in their temple had just lost a beloved member after a long illness.  
The student followed Rabbi Heschel into the family's living room,  
eagerly awaiting to see what the great thinker and teacher would say.  
What sacred texts would he quote?  
How would he draw upon his years of wisdom and study  
to best offer condolences to a grieving family.  
Abraham Heschel sat quietly on their living room  
couch,  
silently weeping, listening to their story,  
and after an hour or so he rose and bowed low  
and then departed into the night.  
You know what they say: *"Anyone can learn from one's  
own experience.*

*Wise is the person who can learn from another."*

We who have benefited from the graces of others are invited to do so as well.

What have you learned from your angels of mercy?

So let's dare to flip the question.

Who needs for you to show up for him or her or their collective company?

Who needs for you to extend a ministry of presence?

A relative shared with her husband one evening  
that the next day she had to meet with someone at work,  
that it was going to be a difficult meeting  
because this person liked to lord over her  
with his power and prestige and position.  
Her husband asked a couple basic questions,  
like when she anticipated the meeting happening  
and what she hoped to gain from it.  
She felt a little better from talking with him, but was still nervous.  
The next morning at the appointed time  
she walked into the man's office to discuss the matter at hand.  
Suddenly the door opened,  
her husband walked in,  
and quietly sat down next to her.  
He never spoke a word the whole time; his was a ministry of  
presence.  
Her confidence soared. The colleague behaved himself.  
The conversation that followed was fair and balanced  
and ended much better than all parties thought it might.

***Together, the Courage to Show Up***

We may not always be able to have a guardian angel go to work or play with us,  
but we can do what we can.

God calls, and we are invited to show up, to step out, to be present.

Who needs for you to show up,  
to dish out a healthy serving of courage and confidence and commitment?  
Your gift to neighbors in need might be a spiritual ministry of presence,  
of cards and notes, of prayers and blessings, of time or tithes or treasure  
shared with joy and generosity through the Church,  
given unconditionally, without strings attached.

The second time I met one of our church members  
was in a hospital the day after she had been in a car accident.  
That afternoon I visited with her in her hospital room  
as she lay beneath a blanket in a sterile room, bandaged and taped and  
bruised.

I said, *"I am so sorry. Is there anything we can do for you?"*  
*"I am fine,"* she said. *"This morning I looked down the hall  
and saw three prayer warriors from our church striding toward me.  
Minnie Haynes, Frances Shumake, and Millie Suttles were headed my way,  
side by side by side,  
and I knew that neither sin nor sickness stood a chance."*

Being present in the lives of one another is vital. Essential. Invaluable. Sacred. Holy.  
Are you like me, tempted to ask the Lord,

"Uh, have you considered asking Bubba down the road?  
He sure seems to have a lot of tie on his hands!"  
The Lord may get around to Bubba; the call to you and is personal  
and direct.

Show up.

Be around.

Be aware.

Together, yoked by the grace and mercy of God's love,  
we can overcome, and overcome we shall.

Together we are stronger,  
more faithful, braver, surer of ourselves,  
less inclined to be afraid,

more inclined to love, to live, to thrive,

to soar, born again from above, filled anew

with the power of  
*the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*