

Reading

*Given to me by Abby Marschke after our last Board meeting when we discussed
How we show up for each other and other faith.*

This is written by Deirdre Sullivan

I believe in always going to the funeral. My father taught me that.

The first time he said it directly to me, I was 16 and trying to get out of going to calling hours for Miss Emerson, my old fifth grade math teacher. I did not want to go. My father was unequivocal. "Dee," he said, "you're going. Always go to the funeral. Do it for the family.

So my dad waited outside while I went in. It was worse than I thought it would be: I was the only kid there. When the condolence line deposited me in front of Miss Emerson's shell-shocked parents, I stammered out, "Sorry about all this," and stalked away. But, for that deeply weird expression of sympathy delivered 20 years ago, Miss Emerson's mother still remembers my name and always says hello with tearing eyes.

That was the first time I went un-chaperoned, but my parents had been taking us kids to funerals and calling hours as a matter of course for years. By the time I was 16, I had been to five or six funerals. I remember two things from the funeral circuit: bottomless dishes of free mints and my father saying on the ride home, "You can't come in without going out, kids. Always go to the funeral."

Sounds simple — when someone dies, get in your car and go to calling hours or the funeral. That, I can do. But I think a personal philosophy of going to funerals means more than that.

"Always go to the funeral" means that I have to do the right thing when I really, really don't feel like it. I have to remind myself of it when I could make some small gesture, but I don't really have to and I definitely don't want to. I'm talking about those things that represent only inconvenience to me, but the world to the other guy. You know, the painfully under-attended birthday party. The hospital visit during happy hour. The Shiva call for one of my ex's uncles. In my humdrum life, the daily battle hasn't been good versus evil. It's hardly so epic. Most days, my real battle is doing good versus doing nothing.

In going to funerals, I've come to believe that while I wait to make a grand heroic gesture, I should just stick to the small inconveniences that let me share in life's inevitable, occasional calamity.

On a cold April night three years ago, my father died a quiet death from cancer. His funeral was on a Wednesday, middle of the workweek. I had been numb for days when, for some reason, during the funeral, I turned and looked back at the folks in the church. The memory of it still takes my breath away. The most human, powerful and humbling

thing I've ever seen was a church at 3:00 on a Wednesday full of inconvenienced people²
who believe in going to the funeral.

“Showing Up”

“Here is the world; beautiful and terrible things will happen.

Be not afraid.

Because this is what we are about:

We hold hope for each other when hope is hard to find.

We plant seeds that will one day grow.

We are prophets of a future not our own.

We cannot do everything,

But we can do something.

So forget your perfect offering.

There is a crack in everything.

That is how the light gets in.”

I come down out of the pulpit this morning

Because while there are some Sundays and some sermons

That deserve and even benefit from the height and distance

The Puritans wanted the preacher to have,

Today I want to talk with us, not preach at you, but talk with you...with no distance,

No me up there and you down here...

So we get a visible expression of our message this morning,

Which is how belief and pulpit pronouncements, and practiced preaching,

And church mission statements and memorized UUAC covenants,

While good and important,

Matter less than the religious practice of meeting one another eye to eye, face to face,
Showing up for each other with our bodies, our hands, our arms, our shoulders.
Why?

Well – and here you hear me repeat these words over and over –
because we are church and faith that is about
belonging more than belief,
horizontal more than vertical,
fidelity to community more than fidelity to any particular idea of God
(which isn't the same as saying God isn't important!),
Covenants not creeds,
Deeds not creeds,
Preaching practiced more than preaching practiced,
More about getting more heaven into people than people into heaven.

We know all this, right?
Sometimes we can even be a little smug about it, if we're honest with ourselves,
A little snobby.
As if somehow ours is a better religion, a better church, than others.
So to clarify – as far as I believe - there is no test,
no one will be giving out a grade, whoever has the most chalices won't win.

In fact – and this I do believe - the only real proving ground is life,
And the only exam that gets given is the one we wake to every morning,
Our eyes blinking open to the light of the day,
As we try and fail, try and succeed, try and almost, almost, just nearly...

To love, to forgive, to stretch, to be patient, to be kind, to give,
Be the person our dog thinks we are, and not, if you have cats,
Who the cats knows you to be.

In other words...

Don't tell each other what you believe; don't give each other the answers you want
me to hear.

What matters is how you show up - When. Where. How.

The test is not a test of pronouncements. The test is a test of presence.

Which is, sometimes, a tough pill to swallow for a preacher.

Good thing you call me, and call Heather and Otto, to be more than that.

So now no more notes and let me talk...*share story of my showing up with Judy
Maguire in hospital this week...*

Here's what I believe – that each you have some one or something waiting, just
Waiting, for you to show up to.

It could be a person, it could be a cause, it could be a promise you're making to
yourself.

Do it. Do it today. Don't wait.

Amen....