

Better Together: Show Up
Sermon 6-3-18
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Hebrews 10:19-25

¹⁹Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Message:

In light of Abundant Life joining us here this morning, I thought that it would be very appropriate to freshen our perspective on building community. Building community is the bread and butter of the Brethren, but as good as we are at it, sometimes we fall short. In fact, sometimes the community we're building turns insular. It becomes about just mingling and building community with people like us. People who share our heritage or who can play the name game to see who knows who and discover how we're related or connected. It's a fine game to play, but if you're not usually in the Brethren or Pennsylvania field of play, you feel left out. I remember at one time being awakened to how insular I can be. I got talking to a fellow seminarian once and she was sharing with me how she came to the Lancaster area out-of-state. And how for many years it was incredibly hard to get connected with people in the Lancaster area. I was surprised of the difficulty she expressed because how can that be? Lancaster people are friendly people. Well...even though many tout the Lancaster area as being a great area to raise a family and get connected, it's hard to get connected when you haven't grown up in the community. Families are deeply embedded in Lancaster County. Generation after generation have stayed local and connected to family and friends. So, if you're on the inside, it's great. But if you're on the outside, it's really hard to get on the inside. You could say that Lancaster County is inhospitable in that sense. And I think of THIS area, the Royersford area, and our church in a very similar sense. It's great if you're on the inside and you know people and have deep family and friend roots. But if you're from the outside, it can feel very isolating. And not

to mention, this area continues to be a transplant area. People from all over the U.S. and world are coming to live in this area as it becomes a growing suburb of Philly. The cultural landscape is drastically changing, if it hasn't already done so. Over the next five weeks, we're going to journey through what it means to be community together. Not just as Providence Church, but being community with Abundant Life. This sermon series is based off of Andy Stanley's small group curriculum, "Community: Starting Well in Your Small Group." How can we be better together?

About 8 or so years ago, I was about a year or so out of college. And I was on vacation at Bethany Beach with my family. The same vacation we take annually. I was very much into growing as a professional. Reading books and focused on my development. I was enjoying young adult life. While on this vacation at Bethany Beach, I remember being really engrossed in some youth ministry book. I was sitting out on the screened-in porch on a cool evening. It was relaxing. I was enjoying myself and my book. Then, my niece, Abbi, came out to the porch and she asked me if I wanted to come with her and the rest of her family, my brother, his wife and her younger sister, to the Rehoboth Beach boardwalk to play games and go on some rides. And she was adorable and so sweet about it. Even thinking back to that moment makes my heart melt. Now, you might be thinking, no big deal. But what happened, I remember so vividly in my mind because I feel guilty about it to this day. I remember thinking before I answered, "I don't want to go to some dumb boardwalk. That sounds boring. Can't she see that I'm enjoying my book!?!?" I was annoyed by the request. So I declined. I remember seeing the rejection on her face. She had taken the risk to ask her uncle to join her and I rejected her. Now, I doubt she remembers that encounter today, but I do. I think such a simple encounter sticks in my mind today because it summarized my relationship with my brother's family and my nieces during that time in my life. I was so preoccupied with my stuff, what I wanted, how I wanted to grow and what I needed, that I couldn't be bothered with anything else. In so many words, my niece made herself vulnerable in asking me to "show up" and I failed to do so. I lacked a relationship with my brother and his family because I failed to show up. I failed to show up to my nieces' activities. I failed to connect with them during family gatherings. I failed to make efforts to get together with them and build relationships. I neglected these things.

Now, maybe I'm putting too much pressure on my younger self. But I can look back and agree with those failings because in recent years I've made a lot more effort to be part of my nieces' lives. They're now teenagers. I'll never get back those childhood years of connecting with them, but I can connect with them now. I've attended their soccer games and went to Hershey Park with them. I've spent a lot of time laughing and talking with them over dinners. Recently, I've

bonded with my other niece, Ella, over the Marvel superhero movies. I let her borrow all of my Marvel movies this past winter so that she could binge on them. And then we went to go see the latest Avengers movie together this past spring. When I review even the past few years of connecting pretty well with them, it didn't take much. I didn't have to have really in-depth conversations with them on each encounter. I didn't have to give up my whole life for them. All I had to do was simply "show up" and things just naturally developed. I naturally built relationship with them over time. You might be saying, well...yeah...duh! Exactly...duh! But how often do we fail to just simply "show up?" We might say, "I'm tired." Or, "I don't feel like going." Or, "It's too much work." Or, "I have to do what?" Or, "I have to work." We come up with every kind of excuse not to show up.

In our passage, it's also about showing up. ¹⁹"Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)..." Think about this, where would we be if Jesus Christ didn't show up? What if God sent His son to earth and Jesus just simply said to God, "Father, you know what, I don't feel like doing all that. That sounds pretty hard"? What if Jesus said to the Father, "You know what...I just want to heal people, tell these awesome parables and teach, but that whole cross and dying thing, I don't want to do that"? And actually, in a sense, Jesus did say that in Matthew 26:39, "And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.'" You see that conflict inside Him. He doesn't want to do what is to come, but at the same time He is going to submit to the will of the Father. Of course, we know in the end, Jesus does show up. And thank goodness that He does. Because Jesus shows up, we can "...enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus..." No longer is there a barrier to speak to God. No longer are we bound by sin and judgment and punishment. By the blood of Jesus we are set free to have a relationship with God. Also notice this little piece of our passage, because Jesus showed up, new things opened up. "...²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)..." When we show up, new things open up. When we show up to church on Sunday morning, new things can open up. And in our context with connecting with Abundant Life, when we choose to show up and mingle a little bit with them, who knows what new things could open up? What new ministries could be birthed? For many of you who are older, what wisdom could you pass on to a younger generation? Who knows how we could be mutually blessed simply by showing up?

²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure

water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds...” Notice the “let us...” language in those few verses. This building community thing. This “better together” thing, isn’t about the individual. It isn’t just about Curtis. It isn’t just about _____. It’s just about what I want or what _____ wants. Because we know the grace of Jesus, because we believe in His salvation and work on the cross, let US build this something together by the work of the Holy Spirit and by the grace of God. But also notice some subtle words in verses 22-24. “...let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of FAITH...” And then in verse 23, “...let us hold fast to the confession of our HOPE without wavering...” And verse 24, “And let us consider how to provoke one another to LOVE and good deeds...” These verses echo 1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” Embedded in this idea of showing up, is that by showing up we are taking an act of faith into something new. That we believe that our God is faithful and He will provide all our needs. Embedded in this idea of showing up is that we will have hope. Because God is our hope and we know that God’s hand is upon this new venture with Abundant Life, we can hope that something new can be formed. That new ministries and the Kingdom-sized things can be created because we have this hope of Jesus on our side. Embedded in this idea of showing up is that we will love because He first loved us. As I illustrated earlier with my nieces, showing up is a simple act of love. You might be saying, “Well...I can do that. It doesn’t take much.” And you’re right! It doesn’t take much! In fact, it’s the minimum amount! And yet, we so frequently fail to show up to things for pretty bogus reasons.

And here is where it gets summed up in our passage, “²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Believe it or not, some in the early church had this same problem. They may have believed in Jesus, but they just simply failed to show up. And then they wonder why they keep on sinning. They wonder why they keep making bad choices. They wonder why they can’t attain a healthier life. In the study guide of Andy Stanley’s “Community” curriculum, he says this, “Life is better connected because connected people go further, faster.” “Life is better connected because connected people go further, faster.” The elders and I have noted this a number of times in our conversations around having Abundant Life join us in our building. When you meet one more person, they have a whole network of connections. You need a good plumber, they may know someone who does excellent work. We need someone who is more tech savvy in the techbooth, maybe they have someone in mind. And vice versa, someone from Abundant Life needs advice on how to navigate social security with their father or mother. Guess

what? Some of you may be able to help. Now I can't promise anything, but, rumor has it, there might be a few people from Abundant Life who might want to help out with Nutrolls. Can you believe that?!?! On the more serious side though, imagine how we can encourage each other in our faith as well. Many of you have a lifetime of experience of faith. Imagine how you could encourage a younger crowd in their faith. Imagine how they could encourage many of you with their energy, passion and zeal. But we can't encourage each other, build the Kingdom of God, if we don't do one simple thing first: show up.

When we talk about connections and building community, Andy Stanley outlines four types of relationships that we all have. None of these are good nor bad. They just are. The first is, Public. Public, is as it sounds. We might bump into someone at a concert or at an Eagles game that we have similar interests. When a great song was played or the Eagles score a touchdown, we feel a sense of comradery with the people around us because we love and appreciate the same stuff. You might be sitting next to someone here in worship that you don't know, but you're singing and worshiping God together. But it doesn't go any deeper than that. That's a public relationship. The next level of relationship is, Social. Social is more like what you might experience here at first on Sunday morning with Abundant Life. You might make a first impression upon each other. You may have some small talk around the weather and what's happening in the community. But just because you're friendly with each other, doesn't necessarily make you friends. The next and third level of the relationship is, Personal. Personal goes a little deeper to things like sharing experiences, stories and feelings. It moves into friendship territory. Have you ever had that experience where you share a story that you thought was unique and you maybe felt isolated about it, to then find out that when you share it with someone, they had a similar experience? And then all-of-a-sudden you don't feel so alone and isolated because you're not the only one with this experience. The "Personal" type of relationship isn't something to be forced, but when it happens, it's beautiful and unique. These are the types of relationships that Jesus probably had with James and John, for instance. The fourth and last type of relationship is, intimate. These are the closest of the closest. These are your best friends. These are the people that you trust with your deepest and darkest and most vulnerable experiences. It might be your spouse or a best friend. In Jesus' case, this was Peter. That was Jesus' most intimate relationship on earth. You know, I'm reminded of Lin's testimony the other week when I think about this category. Lin has such a unique and wonderful friendship with Keith. They've been through thick and thin with each other and they've encouraged each other in their faith throughout the years. They're "kindred spirits" as some may say. But again, none of these relationships can happen, if you stay at home. None of these relationships can develop to something more, if you don't show up.

I get that it can be tough at times. As a fellow introvert, I get that a big room of people feels overwhelming and you might just want to roll-up in a ball and roll away. But I want to encourage you to do a few things. One, push yourself to show up even when there are big crowds around. It might be loud. It might be uncomfortable. Push yourself for five minutes. Maybe even start at 1 minute. Just to push yourself to make those new connections so that we can build together new Kingdom things. Secondly, I want to encourage you to show up early to church over the next few weeks. Some of you may just choose to go to the worship service here at 10:45, but I want to encourage you to be intentional about coming early to mingle and interact with the people of Abundant Life. They really are wonderful people. Christine and I had the pleasure of getting to know some of them already. They're great people. Lastly, when I say "show up," I don't just mean, show up with the Providence people. It's easy and natural to gravitate towards people we know. That's what's comfortable. But I want to encourage you to push yourself out of the Providence clique and make the effort to connect with the Abundant Life people. If it's too intimidating to do alone, go two-by-two. That's how Jesus sent His disciples out, two-by-two. That can be a little more comfortable than doing it alone.

As we reflect on our passage and we think about our relationship with Abundant Life, I want to encourage us once again in, "...²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching." As you may have experienced through this message, "showing up" isn't all that hard. And you're right, it isn't. But that's how community starts. Showing up to family events. Showing up to friends gathering. Showing up on Sunday morning on time or earlier to mingle. We have to remember that without Jesus showing up, we wouldn't know the amazing grace that we have in Him. We wouldn't know the freedom from guilt. We wouldn't know that healing forgiveness He offers. Jesus is a relational God. He formed the ultimate relationship with us simply by showing up on this earth. Belittling Himself in becoming a human and walking among us. Because we know the love of Jesus, we are called to pass that love on to others around us. We are called to live in faith and in hope and in love. Thank goodness for the grace of Jesus! Thank goodness that He showed up! Let us move forward in showing up so that new things can be created! New relationships for the Kingdom of God can be formed! That mutual blessing may abound and that God may be glorified! We are indeed better together by the grace of Jesus! Amen.