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The Power of Showing Up

BY DEACON PHIL

There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on earth nations will be in dismay...people will die of fright in anticipation of what is coming upon the world .

If Fox News and MSNBC had been on the scene when the Evangelist Luke penned these words of Jesus somewhere between 80 and 90 AD, the media, believing them to be literally true, would have gone absolutely ballistic.

All their experts would be trotted out to provide insightful commentaries, and the pundits would have said Jesus was talking about the economy. Just imagine the hysterical news coverage...

Breaking News! The value of the Schekel is plummeting! Investors are buying up Greek Drachmas and Roman Denari!!

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Well, we know that Jesus really wasn't talking about the economy when he referenced people "dying of fright." He didn't seem to be very interested in economics, unless it was about the effects of monetary policies on the poor.

He was referring to anxiety about the apocalypse and the end of the world, which most people would agree to be far more serious. The point is that people really do worry about things, whether it's about the end of the world or the end of economic security.

Those projections of doom and gloom sound a bit like what we hear from the media in our day, doesn't it. Whether it's the threat posed to our economy by the looming "fiscal cliff", or the threat of global terrorism, or global warming and "super storms", or drug resistant bacteria and "super bugs" that will wipe us out, or serious conflicts in the Middle East, it scares you to death to turn on the television.

I recently read that people are actually building and stocking underground bunkers so that they can survive the coming apocalypse. It reminds me of my childhood in the 1950's when people built bomb shelters in their backyards because they were convinced that a nuclear war with Russia was imminent.

There's plenty to worry about now, and there always has been. It's enough to make a person die of fright in anticipation of what is to come upon the world.

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It is a fact that the problems we face in our day are incredibly serious, and we should not hide our heads in the sand like an ostrich, or close our eyes like a small child who thinks if he can't see it, it doesn't exist. Yet even a cursory study of human history leads one to conclude that no age is without equally serious problems.

Consider the wars, famines and plagues that have afflicted humanity throughout history. Imagine the anxiety and uncertainty that our ancestors experienced in the face of all of those catastrophic events! How did they deal with it in their day? How do we deal with problems in our day, not only as a people but also as individuals?

Everyone in this chapel, at some point in his or her life, has had to deal with uncertainty. We can all recount past and current times of uncertainty, including times when you thought that you just might die of fright in anticipation of what was to come.

I have a wonderful group of friends from high school, 3 guys I've known for over 50 years. Bill, Carroll, Rodger and I and our wives are as close as brothers and sisters. Roger's wife, Linda, was recently diagnosed with a rare form of ALS. It is progressive and it is incurable. We all know what this means and it scares us to death, especially Rodger.

I'll be 70 years old in a couple of years, and I am beginning to see the writing on the wall. My contemporaries are also aging and we will all become increasingly susceptible to the diseases and disorders that come with age, and that is an uncertainty that is rather unpleasant to contemplate.

And those of you who are younger have your own uncertainties. The prospects of finding a job upon graduation, paying back enormous student loans, finding the right person to spend the rest of your life with, and having sufficient financial resources to start a family can be terribly disturbing.

Add short-term anxieties like getting a good grade on a test or making enough to pay your monthly bills to the long-term anxieties that we all face to some extent and it's enough to scare you to death.

What are we to do? Who can we turn to? Who can console us in our trials and tribulations?

It is of course God we turn to in our day, as our ancestors in faith did in theirs. In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he writes:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.”

There you have it. It is remarkably simple and beautifully concise. It is God we turn to when faced with uncertainty and anxiety.

And it is we ourselves who must console **one another** “in any affliction” as it is written.

I think we can only do this, or at least do it well, if we are grounded in the reality that God does in fact console us, rescue us, save us and redeem us from all that could harm us.

Experience tells us that it does at times happen in this life. Faith assures us that it will most assuredly happen in the next life. And this Faith, given to us in Baptism, is nurtured through Word, Sacrament and Community until it becomes more real in our hearts and minds than any passing trial or tribulation that might cause us to be anxious and uncertain.

It is that Faith in God's consolation that enables us to console one another. Paul says and speaks the truth: You can't give away what you've never had. You can't share what you haven't experienced.

It is well known that experience is the best teacher and that those who have experienced troubles of any kind are best equipped to help those with similar troubles.

That is the genius of Alcoholics Anonymous and Mother's Against Drunk Driving, or any other support group of people who have endured loss of any kind. There is no one like a recovering alcoholic who is better equipped to give hope to the alcoholic who is struggling with his disease. There is no one better equipped to console a grieving mother than a woman who herself has lost a child.

Since all of us suffer in one way or another we are all well equipped to offer consolation to one another.

We may need to learn a few skills to be able to do that well, but it is our personal experience that gives us that most necessary foundation to be able to console another.

Kate Braestrup, the best selling author of *There If You Need Me*, lost her husband, a State Trooper in Maine, when he was killed in the line of duty. At the age of 34, with 4 young children, she was devastated. Kate went on to become an ordained minister in the Unitarian Church, and she is currently the Chaplain to the Maine Game Warden Police.

In that ministry she is often called upon to console grieving family members of those who die by accident or by their own hand in the deep woods of Maine. I heard her speak at a conference in Maine this past summer. And Kate said that one of the most helpful things to do in assisting those in trouble is to simply “Show Up.”

That is something we can all do, even if you are not a trained therapist or an ordained minister... Show Up.

Showing Up

Show Up for your brother or your sister who is caught in the throes of uncertainty, anxiety or loss. Showing Up is perhaps the best consolation you can give.

It’s what Mary and I and our high school friends did when we went to Kansas City to visit Rodger and Linda after they got the terrible news of Linda’s ALS. It’s what our group of high school friends did a couple of years ago when we “showed up” to comfort our friend, Bill, when his precious 5 year old granddaughter had a stroke and died.

One of the issues facing the Millennials is that because of technology and the internet, hitting “Like” on Facebook or signing up for a friends page becomes a way to “show up.”

There is even a virtual way of doing church now! People can upload and watch a video of church at their own convenience. It

seems that “showing up” is becoming no longer an



embodied experience for us. And there is a loss in that for all of us.

“Showing Up” is what we celebrate in this Advent and Christmas Season. We celebrate a God who loved us enough to “Show Up” 2,000 years ago in a backwater town in an occupied country. We celebrate this Jesus who “shows up” on this altar each and every time we celebrate His death and Resurrection, and partake of his very Body and Blood.

And while we may not think of it in these terms, we also celebrate this Jesus by showing up for the least of his brothers and sisters,

When we show up...

- + at the hospital to visit the sick or the dying;
- + at a wake or funeral to comfort those who mourn;
- + at a nursing home or a prison to visit the lonely or the despaired;
- + for a friend who is devastated by a divorce or the breakup of a relationship;
- + to feed the hungry at a food pantry or visit the homeless at a shelter.

The list of opportunities to show up is endless, because the needs are so numerous.

There always has been, and there always will be uncertainty in life. Left to our own devices, we can become paralyzed with fear and anxiety. Left to our own devices, we can be crushed by life’s trials and tribulations.

Yet we have a God who “shows up” for us, and calls us all to “show up” for each other...to do for each other what God does for us...to give comfort to one another in times of anxiety and uncertainty.

It is God who consoles us...it is God who gives us the grace and strength to console each other. That, my friends, is for certain.

Prayerful Reflection Box

- 1) Who has “Shown Up” for you?
- Offer a prayer of gratitude for them.**
- 2) For whom have you chosen to show up?
For what causes do you show up?
- Embrace your passion and love.**
- 3) For what circumstances do you most resist to show up? What is the source of that fear?
- Petition to God for Courage.**
- 4) How do you show up for God?**