

MAY 24, 2026

# Marion weekly update

## FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

*SERMON "Water the Flower" Numbers 16:23-35, John 6:60-70*

Today we are going to take a very common and true reality and clarify it just a little bit more. There is a well known truth that the first step towards making anything happen/work/improve is showing up. There is a lot of truth to the statement that the world isn't changed by the most qualified or talented. It's changed by those who show up. Whatever meager contribution I might make is still pushing further towards a better world than someone who has a lot more skill than I do but doesn't lift a finger.

Showing up is critical. Some of you have heard me share the quote from Mike Carlin that is in the bulletin. Sometimes I like to see the face behind faceless personalities so I thought you might as well. Mike Carlin was the editor in charge of all of the Superman comics in the late 80s and early 90s. He was in charge when Superman died.

What was happening was that more violent what they call "anti-heroes" were dominating sales. Superman, often called "the world's biggest Boy Scout" was known for his integrity, purity, and unshakeable moral compass. His popularity had faded in light of the new wave of characters. As the creative teams met, one of the creators at every meeting when they were discussing the books said "let's kill him!"

Finally Mike Carlin entertained it with the question "then what?" What would they do after they killed off this beloved character that had been around for decades?

They decided to go for it and it was worldwide news. And then the quote about who killed Superman. When people tried to blame him as the editor he turned it back on them. "When was the last time you bought a Superman comic?" "20 or 30 years ago". His reply, "I didn't kill Superman, you did." And then the part of the quote I had forgotten and it is absolutely beautiful and on point. "If you don't water the flower, eventually it's going to die."

This is true across every area of life. It doesn't matter how fond we claim to be of something, if we neglect it ultimately it will die off. Just like a flower, if I only water it when it's convenient or when I feel like it, it won't survive. Relationships, businesses, favorite haunts to visit, and even churches all fall victim to this same truth. Their answer to Superman's death was to keep writing stories for a long time about what the world looked like when that light had gone out of it. Eventually they found a way to bring him back and of course he's still flying around in stories today.

That's the benefit of creating a reality in story. It's a lot easier to control the next step and bring the dead back to life. We all know this isn't the case in the real world. Sadly many times once a relationship is ended, once a place closes its doors, once a group disbands bringing it back rarely occurs, at least not easily.

Showing up matters.

It's not just showing up, though. It's HOW we show up. What do we bring with us when we do?

The story of Korah and Dathan highlights this well. They showed up. They were present. How they showed up was a problem. It threatened the Hebrew community. In their pride they wanted to take over believing that they could lead better than Moses. They convinced other leaders to join them.

Moses called to God and asked for God to choose who was truly in the right among them. They gathered and Moses, knowing what God was about to do warned anyone not standing alongside the troublemakers to get well out of the way. God was going to judge. The price for their revolt was dear. Korah, Dathan, and their families and followers were swallowed up by the earth.

The destructiveness of how they showed up wouldn't be allowed to stand.

On the other hand, at least they were forward with their issues. Today things tend to be less forward and fortunately God is far more gracious. My experience as well as most other pastors is that the ones showing up sowing disagreement and stirring up division don't tend to be brave enough to do it forthright. It's usually in parking lot conversations, politicking over a dinner with people behind the back and so forth. Typically by the time it comes to light the wreckage is done. Fortunately God isn't in the business of destroying people like Korah and Dathan anymore.

Sadly this wreaks havoc through so many different areas, including churches. Our denomination suffered from this a few years ago. Without getting too detailed I can tell you that so much of what happened across the UMC through disaffiliations was made so much worse because people refused to simply discuss things out in the open. Most significantly they weren't taking the issues to the places and people that may have actually helped

improve the matter.

How do we show up? Why do we show up? Because sometimes we show up to water and others people show up to poison.

Almost all of us are aware that what we get out of something has a lot to do with what we bring to it.

What do I expect? Am I open to whatever the experience might be? Do I go putting my best productive foot forward? It's no different then working out. If I go to the gym and just walk around talking to people I'm not going to see results. If I go with the intent to put in the work and the effort that's when things change.

Same with relationships and everything else. Did you ever notice how much different work can be depending on our attitude when we show up? Or how much better a marriage works out when both people show up with the intention of loving one another and working out problems when they arise?

Did you know that you can have a horrible time at an amusement park? Or even if you don't feel like going but make up your mind to participate suddenly you have the time of your life? Maybe you've gone somewhere to eat with delicious food but the attitude was off and the meal wasn't terribly enjoyable. Or the food was mediocre at best but the company was stellar and it was one of the best meals of your life.

Faith is no different. What we are willing to put into growing our faith has everything to do with how well our lives will reflect Christ. It has everything to do with how we will grow a genuine gospel message and genuine community of faith.

Part of this is fighting against the modern trend to look at church through consumer eyes. SO many today look for what they "want" rather than what they are wanting to contribute and participate in. More and more we see production oriented worship. And more and more people are coming forward demonstrating that these supposed "spirit led" experiences are in truth carefully crafted to draw out the emotions people are wanting to feel and then labeling it the Holy Spirit. What looks spontaneous is actually rehearsed and planned, sometimes to the minute.

This is the danger of only looking for what we're going to get. It makes us easy targets for manipulation. Let me give you some examples. Follow with me. I'm going to play some music clips. We'll see if any of them transport you into a movie theater. Note the differences.

Danger Zone

My heart will go on: 1:17

Jaws :19

Chariots of fire: :40

When we have an expectation, it's easy to give us what we want to rope us in. In music we call it things like brilliant composition. In film we call it excellent cinematography and inspiring soundtracks. Unfortunately we can employ the exact same psychology and strategies in church and call it the Holy Spirit.

Here's the thing that we have to get. We can manufacture emotional responses. We can NOT manufacture the Holy Spirit. But we can bring ourselves in a manner that opens us up to that Spirit. We can show up with the right frame of mind.

Notice the disciples and the early church. In our gospel passage this morning we see something interesting. Jesus has just finished speaking to an enormous crowd. They couldn't get on board with His message. Except His small group of disciples. Why?

They had given themselves over to Jesus. They were beyond just coming to get their little superficial fix. They were beyond just looking for a miracle and then heading home. They came with recognition of who He is.

As they came they were learning and committing to how they could participate in His mission. They took the time to understand Him. Then what else? They actively took part in His ministry. They healed. They taught. When Jesus ascended and put them in charge that dove in deep. They weren't looking for what they would get, they were looking for what they could give.

What needed done to put this gospel forward so that it wouldn't fade? It was their sacrifice, their work, their willingness to do what needed done. Yet do so without compromising the message of a redemption lived out in a life of radical love and mercy.

And here is what is incredible! In throwing themselves into giving, they received far more than they ever would have just showing up with their own agenda and fishing for what they wanted.

They showed up and how they showed up made a huge difference. It grew a church that had never before existed and carries on today.

You know how they experienced the Holy Spirit? Read scripture. You won't see any planned worship gig. You won't see that they went looking for someone else to make them feel all gushy or gooey in church. Here's what you see.

You see disciples serving and actively ministering. It was in their commitment and their relationships that it

seems the Holy Spirit showed up the most powerfully. On Pentecost they were simply in a room. Together. All showing up with the same spirit, wanting to serve Christ and following His instruction to wait for this Holy Spirit.

That's all that is required. Showing up with a willing heart and a spirit to serve Christ. The rest falls into place.

I remember when I was younger and I thought church was "boring". I'm not exactly sure what I was expecting. God has already offered me redemption. Jesus lived to show me what a faithful life looks like and to demonstrate an unmatched love for me and the rest of the world. The Holy Spirit is given to us and lives within us. What else was I looking for other than just being catered to?

But then something happened. I got involved. I started actually singing when the hymns were played. I got more involved in youth group. I agreed to be a liturgist. In my twenties I picked up a pair of drumsticks and learned to drum for a praise band. They were looking for someone to head up a teen community center. I volunteered. Suddenly it wasn't boring.

But it wasn't because of what I was taking. It was what I was giving. And the return was magnificent.

I encourage all of us this morning, in every area of our lives, show up. And show up with the intention of watering whatever flower is in front of you.

Prepare for what's coming. Ask the question of "how can I pour into" whatever this relationship, work, experience, anything is. Then be thankful to God for the opportunity as you get to watch whatever it is grow in a better direction. As you see your life more fulfilled.

Water the flower of your faith. Water the flower that is this congregation through your time, talent, and treasure. Celebrate as you see what God does through you in the lives of others. And live into everything that God will do for you. If we are faithful, we can count on God being faithful as well.

## 1 Timothy 6

The beginning of this chapter is, and should be, uncomfortable. The instruction is simple enough. Slaves should conduct themselves well in their role so as to bring honor to their faith. If the temptation is there to look for favor just because their master is a fellow believer, don't do it. In fact, work even better for them. Simple. The issue here is that it endorses slavery. We are rightly opposed to it and consider it unchristian. Owning someone as property, seeing others as "less than", and so forth go against the core fibers of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Yet here it is accepted and the role of a slave encouraged to not fight against it. Instead they are to embrace it with a good, bright, and faithful attitude.

Many today gloss over this saying that this isn't the kind of slavery we think about in our country's history. This is a very cheap and superficial cleaning up to make us more comfortable with scripture. The truth is that slavery had many different varieties. Masters likewise. Some slaves were treated well. Others were abused and treated terribly. Slavery was an institution throughout both Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament in the Law you were even allowed to beat your slave to whatever extent so long as they were alive after a day or two.

Slaver owners often used scripture to support their belief that it was acceptable. In truth, scripture offers more support directly FOR slavery than directly against.

Despite this, we have rightly recognized that slavery is wrong. We have other passages in scripture about the equality of us all under Christ, loving our neighbor, caring for those in need, and so on that brought us to this understanding. Thank goodness it did! This is one of those instances where Christians have had to argue with those who came long before to correct something that might have been fine to them, but was nevertheless wrong in God's eyes.

Wealth and money must have been a particular problem for Timothy in Ephesus. It's been noted earlier in the letter and at the end of the letter there is considerable space given to it as well. Timothy is once again charged with making sure false teaching is corrected and those who are stirring up trouble with it called out. The last verse of that paragraph adds "those who use godliness for financial gain".

This lets us know that people using faith to make themselves rich at the expense of others isn't new. We don't know exactly how they were doing it then, but we have seen it in different ways throughout the history of the church.

Today we have the prosperity gospel where preachers promise great financial reward if their followers would pony up contributions to them and their "ministry". The church and preachers get richer while the congregation holds on to empty promises and get blamed for the lack of return because their "faith isn't strong enough". Conferences are pitched with "special knowledge" if you're willing to pay and show up. In some churches healing is offered, but at a price.

This and more. Guilt and shame are pushed and relief can be found in faithfulness. And faithfulness is tied to how much money you can offer up.

This is why there's much space given to making sure Timothy understands both to watch out for this in his leaders and to not fall into temptation himself.

"Many have been led away" because of their greed. "The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil". "You came in with nothing and you'll go out the same way." The warnings are very evident and clear.

Yet it stops short of condemning people for having money just as a matter of course. Money isn't the problem. It's what we allow it to do to us. So there's antidotes offered.

"Don't be arrogant." "Be generous and share". "Be content". "Be rich in good works." "Lay up a foundation of treasure in the place where life matters". In other words, live faithfully.

Money isn't bad. Those that have it in abundance have a great gift, privilege, and responsibility. It is simply another tool to use in living out their faith. Doing so leads to genuine contentment of heart and mind. It maintains and strengthens the connection to God and Christ. Not only does it build the Kingdom of God here, but it also builds up a reward in the Kingdom of God we hope to share eternally.

There is an insertion in between these chats about wealth that seems to be very much an encouragement and praise to God. It ends with "Amen", or SO BE IT! A fitting thing to include in the parting words of the letter. Timothy is reminded to whom he is accountable, but more importantly why his ministry is correct and fitting.

Some of the comments like adhering to the "instructions of Jesus" and citing a vague "confession" of Jesus before Pilate should be noted just as a reminder to read scripture on its own terms. These instructions and this confession aren't specified. That's perfectly fine. Likely Timothy knew what was being referenced even if we don't.

The caution is to not attribute our own assumptions to what they might be. If we do then we assume scriptural affirmation of our own ideas. Keep in mind that the gospel haven't yet been written when this letter was sent to Timothy. That means all of that Jesus stuff we call scripture they didn't have yet.

What they did have were traditions of Jesus. Early followers passing down teachings and stories. They carried through the communities of faith giving them a foundation for what it meant to be a believer. Ultimately we get windows into what they might be by reading the letters in the Bible. We get a clearer view of what carried on affirmed by the early disciples and church in the gospels.

The point simply being that pushing my own thoughts onto the letter to Timothy doesn't do the letter justice. The letter is a work of wonder in and of itself without me tampering.

Timothy had his hands full. It looks like there was a good amount of false teaching he was contending with. There were people of means trying to fiddle with the ministry and message. This letter lets Timothy know he is "seen" and his circumstance both understood and given grace. The writer is encouraging and supportive, giving advice and reminding Timothy that he is where he is supposed to be, following the calling that was affirmed by others in the faith.

Find the people who see you. Let them lift you up in your struggles. Be grateful that they love you enough to do so. Then when you have the opportunity to do the same to some other "Timothy", don't hold back. Be kind and bold with your support, encouragement, and wisdom.

That's how they had to be to not give up. The power and strength of God is so often conveyed through us to one another. Don't be shy in giving it or accepting it!