

# Show Me!

## September 15, 2019

Pastor Tom Ford  
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### Luke 15:1-10

Grace to you, and peace, from God Our Father and Our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

John McDonald is the author of 70 best-selling novels, including 20 about the “Salvage” expert, Travis McGee. McDonald was once interviewed in USA TODAY by George Vasallo. One of the questions that was put to him was: “What was the best piece of advice you were ever given?” His answer was a colorful illustration of the power of demonstration or example over mere theorizing. His answer was: “Don’t tell’em, show’em.”

Telling them is like this: Russell was a man with a very bad case of body odor. Showing them is like this: As Russell came walking down the country road, a herd of goats looked at him in consternation, then all ran off into a field gagging and coughing.

If you ask me, what is God like, I have two basic options. I can tell you. Or I can show you. If you ask God, what are you like, which is the same as asking “Who are you?” he will not tell you. He will show you. Which is precisely what The Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Our Lord was and is all about – God’s showing us who he is, what he is like.

The Gospel lesson today is a prime example of the ‘show’em’ approach. The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” Jesus didn’t tell people matter-of-factly that God’s love is boundless - it is for everyone, even crooks, bums, and winos. He showed people by eating with them. So, you and I, in living out the Christian way of life, can be more effective in communicating God’s boundless love that is inclusive of every class, race, variety and station of life as we show this in our actions.

During a war a man died, and his two friends desperately wanted to give him a decent burial. They found a cemetery in a nearby village. It happened to be a Roman Catholic cemetery and the dead man had been a Protestant. When the two friends found the priest in charge of the burial grounds they requested permission to bury their friend, but the priest refused because the man had not been a Catholic. When the priest saw their disappointment, he explained that they could bury their friend outside the fence.

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This was done. Later, they returned to visit the grave but couldn't find it. Their search led them back to the priest and, of course, they asked him what had happened to the grave. The priest told them that during the night he was unable to sleep because he had made them bury their friend outside the fence. So he got up and moved the fence to include the dead soldier.

In Christ, God has "moved the fence" to include the undeserving. That includes all the people you and I might consider undesirable. The uneducated. The dirty. Those on welfare. Unwed mothers. Drug addicts. Criminals. Mexicans. Blacks. Russians. Republicans. Democrats. Baptists. Some varieties of Lutherans. It also includes all types and varieties of enemies. It includes those people we despise, for whatever the reason.

It includes those people we mistrust. And those people we fear. Which is usually those people with whom we are angry.

Now, I could go on and on telling you this. I'd rather try to show you. I have told you this story before, but I don't believe all of you heard it. When I was about seven I rode a school bus, #26, a big yellow International, every morning for 45 minutes to get to the rural school I attended. The stop after mine was for the Goodman girl and the Moffits. There were seven Moffits. These seven Moffits and their parents lived in a two-room shack. I went down there once and literally threw up; the filth was so rank.

The Moffit children were the poorest, dirtiest, foul-mouthed, abused children I have ever met. The mother and the father fought constantly. The oldest boy, Ronald, was always getting into trouble at school. Pulling knives on people. Stealing. Lying. Most of the children looked down on the Moffits and would have little to do with them. Most of the neighbors looked down on the Moffits and considered them trash. I remember that I was scared of Ronald. I had seen him act like a wild animal. And when those kids got on the bus, the last thing I wanted was for Ronald to come and sit beside me. I trust that you get the picture.

Well, there is more. One morning after I boarded the bus and we stopped and picked up the Goodman girl and the Moffits, something happened. Not on the bus. But at the Moffit shack. Nobody really knows what provoked it, but there was a great fight between Mr. and Mrs. Moffit. All the kids called them Ole' Lady and Ole' Man Moffit. Anyhow, Ole' Man Moffit grabbed a butcher knife and slit Ole' Lady Moffit's throat. I found out about this when I got home. I had wondered why the Moffit children hadn't ridden the bus home that day. Well, somehow, Ole' Lady Moffit survived. Ole' Man Moffit was tried and convicted and sent off to prison. The children were sent to orphanages. Mrs. Moffit spent time in a mental hospital, later remarried and moved far away. And the neighborhood breathed a sad sigh of relief. But there is more.

When I was 13, one summer day, my grandmother and mother were preparing an unusually large meal for a Saturday. I asked, "What's this all about? It's not Sunday." My grandmother said, "Mr. Moffit is

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coming home today. And we're going to ask him to eat with us. Go out in the front yard and watch for him. You'll see him coming down the road. He'll be wearing a white shirt and a white pair of pants. Tell him I want to talk to him and ask him to come up here. We lived on a hill. Well, let me tell you, I was scared. That old man had slit his wife's throat. He had spent time in prison. He was dangerous. Maybe he had a switchblade in his boot. I did not look forward to meeting him. But I went out in the yard and waited. Finally I saw him coming. When he got within yelling distance I called out to the top of my lungs, "Mr. Moffit, grandma wants to see you." Then, I turned and ran back to the house and went inside where it was safe. And would you know it, when we all sat down at the dinner table, as we called it, who should sit beside me but this jailbird who had spent over six years in prison. As a 13-year-old, Mr. Moffit was the biggest sinner I had ever known. And he was certainly sitting a lot closer to me than any big sinner I had ever known. I remember when the meal was over, before he left, he said, "Mrs. Ford," speaking to my grandmother, "This is the best meal I've had in six years. I certainly do appreciate it."

Now, I didn't know it then, but that was the day I learned by being shown what this verse of scripture is all about: This man receives sinners and eats with them. And I didn't know it then, but that was the day I learned by being shown that God's love is boundless and that it is to include everyone, even the people we loathe and least like to be around. And I didn't know it then, but that was the day I learned by being shown what it means, in large measure, to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Welcoming the outcast before there is any assurance that there has been repentance. Not making people into who we want them to be before we'll have anything to do with them. Accepting people as they are. Reaching out to people in love, risking rejection and ridicule. Searching for the lost sheep, diligently searching, until you find it. Searching for the lost coin, sweeping diligently, never giving up until you find it.

It would have been so easy for my parents and my grandmother to have given up on Mr. Moffit. To have said, "That sheep is hopelessly lost. That coin can never be found. Or, let somebody else mess with him. He might be a corrupting influence on our young boy." But they didn't give up. And they didn't give up because they believed that God had not given up on them. And they showed me that that day. It was a great factor in my becoming a Pastor and a great factor in my social ministry orientation. We can tell people all day that God loves them or that we love them. But if we never show them, they'll never know it, never believe it, and never live it.

That's why the Food Shelf is so important. That's why the care packages we make up and give to the homeless are so important. That's why the clothing store we operate for PCC students is so important. That's why visiting sick people and imprisoned people is so important. That's why everything we do in living out the Christian faith is so important. Not so that we try to earn anything or to prove anything, but that we try to show people that God loves them and that we love them and that neither God nor we will ever give up the search. How long does the shepherd search for the lost sheep? Until He finds it. How long does the woman sweep for the lost coin? Until she finds it.

And that means, with respect to bums, riffraff and general undesirable trash, we never give up. We

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continue a diligent search. We receive sinners and eat with them too. We are so involved in showing God's love that all the people society regards as no-good start coming here as the text says, drawing near to hear Jesus. That's the kind of Christianity to which we are invited. To which we are called to grow into. Which we are called to show.

Whether we will show it depends on whether we recognize ourselves as the lost sheep or the lost coin for which God came searching diligently in Jesus Christ. He searched until he found us. He never gave up. Not even a cross or grave cloths could stop him. And nothing we can ever do or not do will ever stop him from searching for us, from being for us, from loving us, from saying to myriads of angels, rejoice with me! I have found my sheep! I have found my coin! Through the Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, through the Sweeper Woman who never gave up, even the One called Jesus Christ, Our Risen and Reigning Lord.

Amen.

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