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## *Just Show Up!*

**A sermon by Canon George Maxwell**  
**The Last Sunday after the Epiphany - Year C**

We were headed to dinner last week when my wife, Mary Hunter, suggested that we participate in Lent Madness again this year.

Do you know about Lent Madness?

It's based loosely on March Madness, also known as the NCAA basketball tournament, and pits 32 saints against one another in a single-elimination tournament format.

On each of the weekdays of Lent, information about two different saints is posted on the Lent Madness website, [www.lentmadness.org](http://www.lentmadness.org).

The idea is that you read and talk about each of the Saints, and then everybody votes for one of them. The winner moves on to the next round.

Sixteen saints make it to the Round of the Sainly Sixteen; eight advance to the Round of the Elate Eight; four make it to the Faithful Four; two to the Championship; and the winner is awarded the coveted Golden Halo.

It's all really fun, and of course we learn a lot along the way!

As soon as Mary Hunter mentioned Lent Madness, our son, Robert, joined in from the back seat, "Well, I wouldn't choose Peter. He's always getting things wrong!"

We laughed, but Robert had a point.

Peter is always getting things wrong.

Jesus calls Peter the rock, but the rock often seems to be crumbling.

It was Peter, for example, who first recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but then it turned out that he didn't really understand what Jesus was saying when Jesus started talking about the need for the Messiah to suffer and be killed.

It was Peter who witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus, but then it turned out that he didn't really understand what was being revealed in Jesus so he tried to capture the moment by offering to make tents for each of them.

It was Peter who sat with Jesus at the Last Supper, but then it turned out that he really didn't really understand what Jesus had to do so he fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane, drew his sword in defense of Jesus, and denied three times that he knew Jesus on the night of the trial.

Peter, though, does one thing that is more important than being right.

Peter keeps showing up, particularly for those who need him.

It's hard to always be right about Jesus because being right requires you to make sense of Jesus in terms that describe the

way you already understand the world to work.

The problem is that the God revealed in Jesus does not fit within what we already know.

This God works in a different way and sometimes it's hard to see the difference because we don't know what we're looking for.

Scientists, for example, rarely find a star that they don't already think is there.

Let me give you an example.

Take Peter's mistake in understanding what kind of Messiah Jesus would be.

Thanks to Peter, we know better than to make the mistake of thinking that Jesus is a political hero.

But, we also know that our world values heroes, so we often picture him as a spiritual hero.

We think of him at the end as being like Socrates, calmly drinking his hemlock as he gives his disciples their final lesson.

But, this is not how Jesus spent the days before his crucifixion.

He did not face his persecutors with calm resignation. He broke down and wept in the garden of Gethsemane, asking that he be spared what he knew was to come.

He did not face his death with heroic courage. He cried from the cross feeling that God had abandoned him.

He did not deliver a last lecture to his disciples about how they might lead a good life. They had abandoned him and were nowhere to be found.

If we are going to get to know Jesus, we are going to have to stop thinking of him as a hero.

He's not the guy who uses extraordinary courage, skill, or wisdom to step up to make everything turn out as we had hoped.

Jesus is the guy who is making everything new through the power of love.

If we want to understand how this all works, then, as Peter shows us, we will have to put ourselves in the presence of Jesus.

We will, in other words, have to show up!

So, this year, I invite you to join us in playing Lent Madness.

But, before you cast your vote each day, I invite you to run an experiment.

Try just showing up in a place you hadn't intended or wanted to go.

You might start in the obvious places: going to your children's events, visiting your aging mother, or attending the funeral of a friend's father.

Or, you might also try something more radical.

You might be more intentional about how you listen to other people.

When a friend opposes you, you might try, for example, to restate what they have just said and describe how they feel, to their satisfaction, before you speak up for yourself?

You might also be more intentional about how you talk to other people.

Notice whether you are giving or taking energy from the conversation.

Is your first instinct to affirm what someone has just said, or to point out how and where they are wrong?

Do people feel more or less free to add their own ideas and suggestions after you have spoken?

Do your stories add to the understanding or enjoyment of the group or do they just establish your position in the pecking order within the group?

After you have completed the experiment, ask yourself three questions:

Where you felt the presence or power of Christ?

What did you learn about yourself from the feelings you identified?

When did you offer your best self to others?

Use this last question to choose your saint of the day.

Which saint seemed to do the most faithful job of showing up and offering her best self to others?

I'm eager to hear about how it goes!