

GOD'S SUPER-HEROES

Summerlea U.C.
Rev. Scott A. Patton
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Exodus 3:1-15
Romans 12:9-21
The 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Prayer

Loving God, in our hearing of the words of scripture,
in our reflections on those words, and in our
attentiveness to the moving of your Spirit among us,
may we hear your Word for us today.

And now, may the words of my mouth... Amen.

The title that I have given to today's sermon is "God's Super-Heroes," the reason being that, after I had read through our scripture readings for today, I found myself thinking about this super-hero theme that, for many years, has been the subject of comic books, movies, and other such things.

And when I read through the story of God's call to Moses, I couldn't help but think of the image of Clark Kent, the mild-mannered reporter for the Daily Planet newspaper, who was Superman's alter-ego. No one ever suspected that Clark Kent was actually Superman because no one could imagine Clark Kent doing the things that Superman did. It seems that Moses felt more like Clark Kent than superman, as we can see in his response to God's call to him.

When God called him to the task of confronting Pharaoh, his response was not, "Great! When do I start?", but rather, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

To put this into more modern language, Moses was really saying, "I'm sorry, God. You must have me confused with someone else. I couldn't possibly carry out this task. I'm really just a nobody."

Then we flip over to the Romans passage, with all the guidelines that Paul gives on how to live as Christian people in the community. Let's remind ourselves of those words: "Outdo one another in showing honour, be patient in suffering, extend hospitality to strangers, bless those who persecute you, give food and drink to your enemies." I think he might as well have gone on to say, "leap tall buildings in a single bound, be more powerful than a locomotive, and faster than a speeding bullet."

It would almost seem that you would have to be a superman or superwoman to do the things that God is calling us to do, but there also seem to be some other parallels that could be made between the themes of our scripture passages today, and the superhero phenomenon which has been with us for many years.

For example, it seems to me like more than coincidence that the very first Superman comics were created and introduced in 1938, not very long after the first World War, and only one year before war would be declared again.

During a time when the forces of evil seemed to threaten to take over the world, perhaps there was a great need for someone, even an imaginary character, to take on the task of working for good and saving the world.

And in response to this perceived need, the Superman character was born. And so we have this character with super-human strength and power who comes to earth and commits himself to the cause of fighting evil and getting rid of the bad guys. But he doesn't want anyone to know who he is. He wants to simply go about his work when he is needed, and the rest of the time, he is disguised as Clark Kent, an ordinary person who is almost the antithesis of a superhero.

And while I have never really been an avid fan of Superman comics, we are all very familiar with the Superman character because he has very much become a part of our culture.

And just as the original Superman seems to have been created out of a social need for such a character, it seems that, unfortunately, later changes to the Superman script also seem to reflect our changing times as well.

You may remember the great controversy that arose in the early 1990's because the unthinkable happened in the Superman comics: after over 55 years of Superman saving the day, he finally met with a power that was beyond his control, which resulted in Superman's death.

But it was only a few months later that Superman returned from the dead – one could even say that a resurrection had occurred, except this time it was not the same Superman we knew before. We now have a version of Superman who is like a cross between Rambo and the Terminator on a bad day; someone who fights violence with even more violence. I pray that this is not the kind of superhero that we are looking for today, but I fear, sadly, that it is.

But, while I'm talking about superheroes, I could also mention one by the name of "Flash Gordon" – and I thought of him specifically because of a rather obscure song that is on the greatest hits album from the band "Queen". The song is simply called "Flash," and its lyrics abound in superhero images of surviving violent attacks and carrying out other astounding feats in the name of preserving the good and saving the world from a violent attack.

For me, the most interesting part of the song is the chorus, which starts out by saying "he's just a man...", indicating that, despite his super-human powers, he is still an ordinary human being with the same thoughts and feelings that all of us have.

And, of course, I can't help but see all of this through the eyes of a theologian, and a lot of it looks and sounds very familiar. The presence of evil (and today, we might say injustice) in the world calls for someone to come to us and show us how to overcome the power of evil and lead us toward that which is good.

And such a one does indeed come to us in the person Jesus. Even a short while in his presence indicated that he was not like other people, that he indeed had special powers that he used for the good of all people.

But he was also "just a man" – someone who shared the experience of being fully human with us, and someone who understood our human limitations as well as our capacity for doing good.

But it would seem, as I mentioned earlier, in the resurrection of Superman from the dead, that these kinds of images are no longer adequate. Perhaps they're not exciting enough for our contemporary taste for power and domination.

Which brings me to the point that I ultimately want to make, which is that we are the ones who are called to be God's superheroes today - and this may surprise you, because if you are anything like me, you don't feel very much like a superhero most of the time.

But let's look at this a little more closely: Moses was being called by God to carry out a seemingly impossible task, and his initial response was the same as the way you and I have often responded to God's call. We often begin by thinking about all the reasons why we can't do it, followed by a conclusion that God must have really had someone else in mind.

And then we turn hesitantly to Paul's words, and we find there a list of requirements for our living that may seem impossible to fulfill. But just as the call of Moses to a special task was no mistake, so the call that God extends to each one of us is no mistake.

Maybe some of us are called to stand up to the Pharaohs of today's world, or maybe we are called to rise to the challenge of working to overcome injustice, or to living peaceably with all people. One thing that is certain, though, is that we are not called because we can leap over tall buildings, or because we're more powerful than a locomotive, and we are not called to punish ourselves if we are not being the people we are called to be all the time.

We are called, not to be perfect, but to be faithful. Being perfect means we can never make a mistake and we must never give less than 100% all the time. I'm very confident that this is not what Paul meant when he wrote his guidelines for how Christians should live.

Instead, he is calling us to be faithful; to always have before us the goal of what it means to live lives in harmony with God's will, but to recognize that we are fallible and imperfect creatures, which only means that we can rely on God's help to do what we may not have the strength to do on our own.

And, another thing that Paul often said is that we have the power of God's Spirit with us as we seek to be faithful.

Sometimes, when our faith calls us to respond to a situation, we may discover a power within us that we didn't even know was there. I am very confident that God will not call us to do something that God knows is beyond our ability, but I also know that sometimes we only discover that ability after we have had faith enough to respond. It is one thing to recognize our human limitations, but it is quite another thing to trust that the power of God can and will work through us.

Moses may have gone in to confront Pharaoh with fear and trepidation, but the point is, he went in! After his initial resistance, he finally responded to God's call and discovered a power and strength within him that he did not know was there – a power that came from God, as he would discover.

Whether it is a specific task that God has called us to do, or the everyday striving to live as faithfully as we are able, God's call is extended to each one of us, and God will be with us and will give us the tools and the grace we need.

And so, we are God's supermen and superwomen, ordinary people with ordinary gifts and talents, yet in possession of the power of God's Spirit working through us, a superhuman power which, each and every day, is changing the world!

Thanks be to God. Amen.