

First Yarmouth Plains Baptist Church
The Rev. Margaret Bell, Pastor
Lent 4 Sunday, March 22, 2020
Sermon: WHAT SALVATION LOOKS LIKE

Who is your favourite Superhero? Or should I say, “was”? Maybe you weren’t into Superheroes when you were a kid. Superheroes exploded from the pages of DC Comic Books back in the day. Superman was one of the first, created in 1938. The 1950’s television show called *The Adventures of Superman* made Clark Kent and his capital S alter ego American Icons. As much as I enjoyed watching reruns of George Reeves as Superman, Batman was my *main man*. I made sure that I tuned in each week, “same bat time, same bat channel” to watch the latest adventure. The cast of Superheroes has grown over time to the point where I simply cannot keep up with them. What has lately surprised me was to learn that, for several years *adults* have actually been donning superhero outfits and going forth into the streets of their cities to combat crime and do community work. Who knew? There are groups to which super- heroes- in- waiting can join up, such as *Superheroes Anonymous*. These crusaders bear names like *Thanatos, The Statesman, Nyx, and Life*. These individuals prowl the streets of their cities giving out basic necessities to homeless people and elderly folks, and reporting incidents of crime to police. Just imagine the challenge for law enforcement to decide, when encountering one or more of these masked crusaders in a dark alley or crime scene. “Is this garbed apparition a vengeful vigilante, a do-gooding citizen or a criminal?”

Many people had the same problem knowing who or what they were seeing, when they looked at Jesus. Who was this ‘unmasked man’ who had had a boring upbringing as a carpenter’s son in the equally boring “Smallville” of Nazareth? Was he just another faith healer, a citizen crusader for the poor, a daring do-gooder for the outcast, a zealot pushing the buttons of the religious establishment? Or was he more? Could this Jesus be The Messiah, the capital S savior of his people? But when they looked at him, Jesus did not present like the Superhero savior whom they had been told or had hoped would come. Yes, he had amazing power and authority --but he looked just like one of them. He *was* one of them. And his not so merry band of men included Galilean fishermen, a tax collector or two plus a ‘boring’ junior accountant from Judea and a handful of women whose mundane duties involved washing and mending clothes and coming up with creative menus that

could be cooked on a make-shift campfire spit. No eagle-eyed Television exec would pick this group out of a crowd for Reality TV!

Nonetheless, this motley group that followed Jesus, viewed him through rose-colored Messiah spectacles. When his disciples looked at Jesus they saw Superman, a Cosmic Crusader who, when the moment was right would rip off his Galilean homespun garb to reveal his true colors. They imagined him as Heaven's four-star general armed and ready, with legions of angels behind him, to do battle against the Evil Empire of Rome. They truly appreciated Jesus for all the good works he was doing, like healing blind and deaf people; but in their minds, these miracles were a prelude, a promotional trailer, so to speak of THE MAIN EVENT. WORLD DOMINATION.

And once Jesus was duly crowned and robed, and placed on David's throne his close advisors, (that would be them, his disciples) would loyally serve him. But, when Jesus told them things that conflicted with their image of him, like the Son of Man was to be handed over to be killed and on the third day rise again, their minds could not absorb it. They could not see that the miracles, teachings and preaching that Jesus was doing was not an advertisement for the MAIN EVENT, it was the MAIN EVENT. This was the kingdom of God infiltrating and transforming the world in real time, one person at a time. Nothing as dramatic as the Heavenly D-Day they imagined. But for at least one blind beggar, it was all the drama that he needed to know that Jesus was the real thing, his Messiah.

First a word about the historic city of Jericho. Jericho is believed to be one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in the world. It is located in what is now the West Bank in Palestinian territory just a few miles north east of Jerusalem. In Luke 18:35-43 we meet a blind man begging alongside the road just outside of Jericho.

As he approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard a crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." Then he shouted, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and ordered the man to be brought to him; and when he came near, he asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him, glorifying God; and all the people, when they saw it, praised God. When the blind man learns that Jesus is approaching he starts calling for him. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" His shouting annoys those around him but he keeps it up.

He knows that this is his moment. But Jesus hears and stops. Maybe it was the title “Son of David” that caught his attention. This was a Messianic title. So he asks the blind man what he wants him, *aka* the Son of David to do for him. To which he replies, “Lord, let me see again.” He says ‘Lord’. He knows that Jesus is not a quack or a magician, but the Messiah.” And yet, the man asks only for his sight. He does not expect anything more. He gets that this is what the kingdom looks like: people like him being noticed, healed, restored to serve Jesus and the kingdom of God. Then when his sight is restored, he praises God, and follows Jesus.

What does salvation look like?

As mentioned, for many in Jesus’ day, salvation looked like a Heavenly Superhero, arriving with his army of angels to save the day. For Jesus, salvation involved seeking and rescuing people: sick people, hurting people, vulnerable people, poor people, rich people. Jesus was willing to serve, sacrifice and even die, to gather people together, like a hen gathers her chicks. Jesus, God’s crusader of love is still on the prowl in our world working to bring his kingdom to bear on a world still plagued with violence, selfishness, poverty, fear and greed for power.

To those caped and costumed crusaders who prowl the streets, all I can say is that if costumes help people to help people, then go and God bless you! But the kind of heroes needed today are not ones dressed with masks to hide their true identities but let their true identities shine in how they respond in a crisis for the betterment of God’s children.

Let’s praise and support the heroes and ‘sheroes’ who are stepping up during the Covid 19 crisis. Let’s pray for the front line people working in nursing and retirement homes and hospitals and clinics who are trying to protect and provide for the vulnerable and sick.

Pray for our military who are ready to do whatever they are asked to do to support communities. Pray for the Prime Minister, Premiers and local government officials who are responding to the crisis based on the best advice of medicine and science.

But as Christians and as citizens we are also called to be God’s heroes and ‘sheroes’ by keeping a safe distance, by practicing good hygiene. by checking in on elderly and vulnerable persons and by living the Golden Rule.

In this time of world-wide crisis we need more human beings choose the Jesus' way of salvation: which includes choosing kindness over meanness, forgiveness over resentment, generosity over greed, compassion over condemnation and co-operation over selfishness. So Christian disciples, let us suit up in our sneakers, jackets, plastic gloves, and smiling faces and do what we can to follow Jesus, so that others seeing us, may recognize him for who he is. Amen