

July 2nd, 2017: The Ultimate Superhero



All week, we've had kids who LOVE superheroes jumping around the church, so excited to talk about one of their favorite topics during our Hero Central VBS. They've been sporting their superhero t-shirts, bathing suits, capes, and towels—showing off some of their favorite gear. Kids love superheroes!

But it's not just the young... it's children of all ages--my husband and myself included! With all the Marvel and now D.C. Comics blockbuster movies, it's almost a cultural obsession. We look toward these super-strong, super-fast, uniquely talented individuals and are captivated by how they use their strength OR power for the good of all, especially the weak, who can't fight for or defend themselves. The underlying battle of good versus evil plays out in each storyline, and there's rarely doubt that the superhero will come out on the side of the good!

I find it interesting that our culture, which is predominantly non-religious and post-Christianity has this obsession with characters that resemble our understanding of God. When things go wrong, when evil is making itself known in the world, we look to the skies for Superman, or Iron Man, or Wonder Woman to swoop in and help make everything ok again—to save us from the evils of the world and keep us safe. While society creates these fictional Superhero characters to look up to, there was a time that people turned instead to God—or their understanding of god—for this ultimate protection and care.

Our Old Testament is full of superhero language used to refer to our God—in the Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, 2 Corinthians, among others, we hear of God as our hope, our strong deliverer, the defender of the weak, the comforter of those in need, and the giver of strength. In some of our early Biblical stories, God's character almost becomes tangible, a being that walks alongside us, who speaks clearly with a chosen few, like Abraham and Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and acts out justice and even vengeance through war, weather, and natural disasters. In this morning's Psalm, we heard, "Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them." And in Isaiah, "He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless." My friends, this is SUPERHERO language!

Our Bible shouts out to us – God, the one who created us, will be the one to swoop in and save us! The one to give us strength and enable us to make it through the challenges we face. It won't look like Thor or the Hulk swooping in at just the right moment to rescue us from danger, it might even be hard to see or imagine what this kind of salvation will look like, but we are promised time and again in scripture, that God will be there to lift us up.

Lincoln Brewster, a Contemporary Christian musician and songwriter wrote a song called "Everlasting God," all about God's superhero qualities. Interestingly, both he and his wife suffer from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and often struggle with mind and emotion numbing, fall-asleep-on-your-feet, physical and mental exhaustion. Does he wish and pray for relief for his chronic fatigue, YES! But instead he experiences God as one who, "will not faint" and "won't grow weary," and that OUR strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord. Our God's superhero action is sometimes as basic as giving us the strength to endure what we thought would defeat us...

helping us to see light and hope in the midst of darkness and despair. It might not be the salvation we are wishing for, but it will be the help we need to get through.

The Superhero movies and comics that we all love have a few things in common... they have these Super-amazing characters swooping in to fix all our problems... to make the world right again... to fix the mistakes that we've let grow way out of proportion. The new Wonder Woman film in theaters now is no exception; it's storyline is based in the early 1900's as World War I was coming to a close. I won't give it all away, but the theology and the battle of good versus evil is really well done! A male colleague of mine posted on Facebook after seeing it, that he was actually in tears on and off throughout the movie for a variety of reasons. He reflected,

"First, there was definitely something ground-breaking about a woman in the leading role of a blockbuster superhero movie. I knew I was witnessing something special. I was deeply moved on a gut-level and tearfully celebrated the empowerment of women.

I also saw a different picture of God. She was unwavering. She was protective. She was beautiful. She was a fierce warrior. She fought valiantly for the helpless. She was compassionate. She elevated love above all else. She reminded me of God. She did so as a woman. Since most of our images and metaphors of God have been male, it was great to receive another visual metaphor to add to the unending theological conversation about the image and character of God.

Even as she helped us visualize a more expansive image of God, her character realized that one person, one hero, not even one god can swoop in and fix every problem in the world. Diana, or Wonder Woman as we've learned to call her, reflects that our humanity is so interwoven with both dark and light, right and wrong, good and evil, that we need to choose for ourselves which will rule our own hearts. Toward the end of the movie, she says this: "I used to want to save the world. To end war and bring peace to mankind. But then I glimpsed the darkness that lives within their light. And I learned that inside every one of them, there will always be both. A choice each person must make. Something no hero will ever defeat. And now I know that only love can truly save the world."

Only love! It is love that helps us make the right choices in our lives. It is love that inspires us to care for the weak and poor, to seek peace and justice, and to fight for what is right. This love that can truly save the world is at the heart of who our God really is! Ours is a God of love, a God of compassion, justice, and care. It is God's love that fills us and empowers us to live out the good in the world, to choose what is right. Our God of love is and will always be the Ultimate Superhero in our lives, and will call us to reflect that love back out into the world. May God's love give you strength when you are weary, hope when you despair, and courage to live for what is right. Amen.