

# “Jonathan Kent, Uncle Ben, and Alfred”

Theme: The Making of a Superhero

Scripture: *Matthew 1:18-21*

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

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**Meditation Moments for Monday, July 14** – Read Matthew 1:18-25, Matthew 2:13-21 – When Jesus came as a human baby, God did not call a great general, prominent politician or well-known priest to be his earthly father. Instead, Joseph, a humble village craftsman, guarded the baby Jesus and his mother. He never became famous or influential, but he played a great role in God's plan of salvation.

- The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels says Joseph was, “a devout Jewish man willing to give up what was often perceived to be a Jewish father's greatest privilege—siring his first-born son—in order to obey God's will.” What dream(s) have you had to give up, either due to circumstances or because you found in your journey with Jesus it was no longer a good fit? What positives in your relationship with God have helped you move beyond the loss of that dream or dreams?
- Joseph most likely did not wake up every day and do whatever he dreamed about the night before. Yet it was vitally important that he promptly obeyed the dreams Matthew recorded. How can you discern which thoughts, dreams or “inner nudges” are from God? (Books like Bill Hybels' *The Power of a Whisper* and Dallas Willard's *Hearing God* offer in-depth insights into that important question.)

**Prayer:** *Lord God, grow in me the kind of quietly heroic strength that it took for Joseph to raise Jesus as his own son, and to protect him and Mary from Herod's murderous designs. Amen.*

**Tuesday, July 15**— Read Genesis 16:1-15 – Sarai, Abram's wife, tired of waiting for the child God promised. Like other well-off women in her day, she had her slave girl, Hagar, conceive a child with Abram, planning to make the child her own. But Hagar's insolence angered her, and her mistreatment drove her servant into the desert. Sarai's God saw Hagar as a person, not just a rude slave, and rescued her. This Egyptian girl was the first person in the Bible to call God a personal name—and tellingly, she used the name El Roi, “God who sees.”

- Sarai (later known as Sarah) couldn't really see Hagar. All she saw, in keeping with the mores of her day, was an Egyptian slave, to be favored or disposed of at will. God's vision was different, and God met Hagar and empowered her to persevere through a hard time in her life. What are the times when you feel most “invisible” to others or to God? How can it empower you to remember that God is always “God who sees”?
- Pastor D. Stuart Briscoe noted, “Using her natural reasoning skills [Sarai] put two and two together and finished up with three! It is encouraging ... to see that even a spiritual man of Abram's stature was capable of making mistakes.” When, with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, have you been able to see that you've made a mistake? How has God's forgiving, steadfast love empowered you to keep moving ahead in your journey?

**Prayer:** *Father in heaven, as you saw Hagar whole and complete, so too do you see me. Give me the vision and the heart to see both myself and others in the way that you see us. Amen.*

**Wednesday, July 16** – Read Luke 8:41-48 – In Jesus’ day, many looked down on the sick (especially those with long-term conditions), and saw them as suffering for sins they had committed. Even worse, this woman’s disease made her ceremonially unclean. But through her trust in Jesus, she received healing and acceptance that changed her forever. This woman trusted Jesus enough to reach beyond the shame of people’s judgment—and his power gave her back her life.

- In the midst of our crazy, fast-paced lives, it is easy to overlook miracles that happen today. Yet God is surely as powerful today as in biblical times. Have you ever seen conflict transformed into peace, illness turned to wellness or a tangled situation solved through a clear answer you’d struggled to see? Have you ever seen someone (maybe even you) completely transformed by Jesus? Are those as much miracles as physical healings?
- We may find it hard to trust God’s power. God is invisible and may seem distant. Pastor Bruce Larsen wrote of this story, “This unclean woman, forbidden by law to have any social intercourse with anybody, defies the law and touches Jesus’ garment ... It is noteworthy that Jesus perceives immediately that a transaction has taken place. That would lead us to believe that when God answers our prayers discernible power goes out from Him.” When have you sensed the power of God’s peace, faith or love in your heart?

**Prayer:** *Lord, I recognize your power is far beyond my understanding. I long to feel your power and healing in my life. I pray that I might have the faith of the sick woman in the crowd today and forever. Amen.*

**Thursday, July 17** – Read **Matthew 27:35-44** – God’s superheroes, living in God’s strength, often do not look the way we’d expect those who wield great power to look. Nowhere was that more true than in God himself in the flesh, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus’ enemies ridiculed him as he hung on a cross: “Look—he can’t even save himself!” Yet, while they scoffed, through that seemingly helpless man on the cross God’s power was extending salvation to the whole world.

- Commentator Myron Augsberger wrote, “At Calvary something was happening to God by man, but something was also happening to man and for man by God.” What do you trust that Jesus did for you that day on the cross? What aspects of all that God did there remain mysterious? When did the power of the cross first touch and change your life?
- It’s worth focusing on who looked powerful at this moment, and who looked weak. Consider the “powerful” people who mocked Jesus; consider the beaten man dying on the cross. Who had the real power? On whose side do you want to be found—and at what price?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, millions worship you this weekend, while no one remembers those “strong” people who mocked you. Teach my heart the truth of the amazing way you used your life-changing power. Amen.*

**Friday, July 18** – Read **1 Corinthians 1:18-25** – **Jesus is God, the Creator-King of the universe (cf. Hebrews 1:1-3). So it would follow that, as Paul said in today’s passage, “the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.” The good news? God shares his eternal power with his people. The catch? It doesn’t always come in the ways we’d expect. Paul knew the often ridiculed and hated message of Jesus had the power to transform lives wherever he preached it.**

- In verses 22-23, Paul directly challenged the main ways the Hebrew and Greek cultures defined power. Jews looked for signs, or miracles, and Greeks desired wisdom, as proof of power. Paul defined God’s life-saving power through the “intellectual foolishness” and “scandal” of Jesus’ death and resurrection. How does your culture and community define power? Do you buy into that definition? How do the power and wisdom of “Christ crucified” reshape your approach to power in your own life?
- Scholar N.T. Wright said Paul “didn’t use clever words to trick people into thinking they believed it because they enjoyed his ... style. The cross had to do its own work. Simply telling the story released a power of quite a different sort from any power that human speech could have: God’s power, beside which all human power looks weak; God’s wisdom, beside which all human learning looks like folly.” At what points do you tend to rely on your own power and wisdom to reach your goals? What steps can you take today to remind yourself to trust God’s strength and wisdom above your own?

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.*

**Saturday, July 19** – Read **2 Corinthians 12:7-10**– Some false teachers in Corinth claimed that they were a cut above the apostle Paul, that he was weak and unimpressive (cf. 2 Corinthians 10:10-12). With pained irony, Paul called them the “super-apostles” (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:5). He knew he could claim imposing human credentials and accomplishments (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:22-27). In the end, he wrote, his right to lead rested on a greater power—God’s power, at work through the very things humans might see as weaknesses.

- Prayer was vital to Jesus' life, and it's vital to our spiritual life. In this passage Paul told his converts a story about a prayer that went unanswered, at least in the way that he prayed it. As Pastor Kenneth Chafin wrote, "Instead of removing the 'thorn' God gave the reassurance of His grace and reminded Paul that His strength was 'made perfect in weakness' (v. 9)." When have you seen God's power work through your own weakness, or the weakness of someone you knew well? What "thorn" are you dealing with now that you can give into God's hands, trusting that he can bend even bad things to serve a good purpose?

*Prayer: Lord God, Genesis said that out of darkness and chaos, you brought the beauty and fruitfulness of our earth. So I ask you to take even the dark, chaotic parts of my life, and create out of them something beautiful by your power. Amen.*

*Family Activity: Try this activity displaying superhero strength! One adult makes two fists, stacks one on top of the other, then extends his/her arms until the elbows are as straight as possible. Now, with the child's hands open, the child should place his/her fingertips on the back of the adult's fists, then gives a very quick push sideways in opposite directions. The goal of the adult is to keep the fists together, while the child tries to knock the fists apart using just his or her fingertips. Because of scientific forces, the adults' fists will separate. Sometimes what looks like just a little strength turns out to be great strength! How do you find this true in your faith? How can your family live out this truth in the world?*

**Theme: The Making of a Superhero**  
**“Jonathan Kent, Uncle Ben and Alfred”**

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber  
July 12-13, 2014 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

**Scripture: Matthew 1:18-21**

*18 This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. 19 Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement\* quietly.*

*20 As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. 21 And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus,\* for he will save his people from their sins.”*

**VIDEO      Superhero Week 3 Sermon Starter**

**SLIDE      Jonathan Kent, Uncle Ben and Alfred**

As we begin, I invite you to take out of your bulletin your Meditation Moments and your Message Notes. At the top you will find a Scripture passage that we are referring to today and below that are some lines where you can take down notes. There is something to write with in the pews in front of you. On the inside you will find daily Scripture readings and we invite you each day to take some time to read them on your own. I think if you spend a few minutes each morning or evening reading the Scriptures and asking these questions and reflecting upon them, they can help your heart and your mind grow deeper as you look more closely at what we are doing this day.

Last week we began this sermon series on superheroes by looking at the history of where these characters come from. Comic book superheroes were developed in the time period after the Great Depression and leading into World War II. We learned last week that it was a group of Jewish American writers and illustrators who dreamed of these characters who would lead America to fight for justice and freedom, to see good triumphs over evil. We learned that many of the superhero characters are modeled after biblical figures in the Old Testament, and Superman seems to have a clear collection the Messiah.

We also recognized how much people are drawn to these stories. The

superhero genre has been the most popular movie in the years since 9/11 and they have taken over Broadway and action figures and T-shirts and bed sheets and breakfast cereals and costumes. We desperately want a piece of their story in our lives. Many of us have worn the costumes like this cape that I have in my wardrobe. You may have made fun of me for that, but the truth is that most of us have had dreams of being a superhero. I've had this cape in my office for inspiration this week, and while I may not have worn it all week, it has helped me remember the way I felt when I wore that cape as a child.

Do you remember how you felt when you wore a costume? Do you remember how you felt when you ran around with cape on? A number of you have e-mailed me pictures of yourself or your children wearing their superhero costumes and I hope you will continue to do that. One of the funniest photos I got came from Rowean Crader.

**SLIDE        Cody Crader at Batman (Graphic)**

The photo is of Kim, Rowean's daughter and her son Cody who went through this extended phase of being Batman. He wore his swim suit, his Batman mask and cape everywhere we went: the grocery store, church, family outings, home.

Rowean notes, "We were turning out our cattle into the San Juan National Forest along with 4 other ranchers for summer grazing. The cattle, cowboys and ranchers were all gathered at the T-Down corral and were branding, castrating, etc. The publisher of our local paper, Dick Patrick, was on site to do a story on this yearly event.

Meanwhile, "back at the ranch," my mom and I were getting a big "feast" ready and about had the old station wagon loaded with barbeque, beans, potato salad, peach cobbler and iced tea to feed everyone working at the corral. Just as we were about to leave, the phone rang and I went in the house to answer it. In that few moments, while I was in the house, Cody got behind the wheel and somehow got the car out of the carport and headed it down the hill living the life of Batman and his Bat mobile.

The barn got in the way. I heard the crash, ran down to see if Batman was okay, and saw him sitting in the front floor board under the brakes with bar-b-que and beans everywhere.

The car still ran so we hobbled up to the T-Down Corral. My husband, Bill, saw the bashed in car, wondered what had happened, jerked Cody out of the car

and blistered his behind. Thus, the clip in the Mancos Times Tribune the next week which reads...

**SLIDE        Mancos Times Clip (Graphic)**

*Batman Bashes Barn, Bemoans Blistered Butt*

Sometimes, even Superheroes, mess up.

And sometimes they get it right. Check out this video from ABC News.

**VIDEO        Window Washing Superheroes News Clip**

What I discovered is that when we put on the outfit that resembles our heroes we believe that we could do things that we couldn't otherwise do. It's the same way you feel when you buy a new pair of shoes and you think you can run faster and farther and jump higher. We put on the costume and we feel like we can overcome and we can do things that we wouldn't otherwise be able to do. The adults in this news clip live an ordinary life of window washing and then they put on the costumes and he become extraordinary. They are able to lift people's spirits and offer them life in the midst of darkness. It's powerful what can happen when we put on the costumes.

We also have not so super stories like one that came out of California. There are many superhero impersonators which walk up and down the streets of Hollywood in front of Grumman's Chinese Theater. They make a living through the tips they get when people pose with them for pictures. But it got a little dicey when two Capt. America's were infringing on each other's territories. Let's hear about what happened.

**VIDEO        Superheroes Fighting News Clip**

They began fighting and became violent and the tourists were scared. The onlookers knew it was bad when Spiderman had to intervene. The truth is that the making of a superhero requires a lot more than a costume. It requires more than a cape or something you can just put on for a moment and then discard when you don't want to wear it anymore.

The making of a superhero goes underneath the costume and is about what is happening internally. We talk about things like character which involves determination and willingness to sacrifice. We talk about things like heart and soul. The making of a superhero has to do with what is going on inside of our heart and soul.

If we are seeking to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world than becoming a superhero means understanding that we have power. Once we recognize we have been gifted with this unconditional and powerful love, then we are called to live that life out in the world. The outside has to match the inside and we know that when it doesn't people are disillusioned with Christians and with superheroes. When we recognize we have power it should change the way that we live.

Research has proven that this is true. Several years ago there was a study done at Stanford University as a group of researchers looked at the role that power plays in our lives. They wanted to uncover the virtual effect of superhuman strength. They brought together volunteers and they set up a scenario where each person had to rescue a child in the center of the city of San Francisco where there had been an earthquake. Half of the people were given the gift of being able to fly like Superman. The other half were given a helicopter. Both of them were charged with completing the same mission of rescuing a child. The mission was rigged and everybody was able to save the child and they saved the child in the same amount of time.

That was not really the test however. The test was to see what would happen to them post rescue mission. What they found is the people who embodied and realized their superpower were more apt to be benevolent and generous in their life afterwards. They were quicker to meet people in their moments of greatest need. They were quicker to help people in a time of distress. They were quicker to respond when they needed to act immediately. The tests uncovered that those who believed they were gifted with the power like Superman actually enabled them to live more benevolent and generous lifestyles. When they gave the gift of being like Superman temporarily to a group of rescuers, they became like that more readily in their daily lives.

That's good news for us because as followers of Jesus Christ we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the things that Jesus did, and even greater things according to Jesus himself. Remember that Jesus in the Gospel of John was speaking to his disciples and we learned last week that he spoke to them these words in John 14:12.

**SLIDE      *12 "I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father.***

Jesus gives us the ability to do great works. Last week we remembeedr that



we have been given this gift to do great things and more than we can ever ask or imagine. The study by Stanford University reminds us that when we remember we have that power, we can and should live lives that reflect the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. We should be able to be more benevolent and generous. We should become like Christ which is the definition of holiness, becoming like Christ and uncovering the image of the divine which is in each one of us. We should be able to give to others life as well, and to usher in a foretaste of the kingdom. We are meant to change the world by the gifts which we are given, but in order to do that it requires that we show up and go to work.

We have to live this and believe this and embody this. Ultimately, we need to practice living out these gifts. One of the things I love about comic book superheroes is that they are not overnight successes. Most of the best comic book superheroes are just like us. At some point they discover a special gift, but they also recognize they are human. When you discover they have this power they practice it like the character.

**VIDEO      Spiderman Practicing**

They tested and they tried it on. Spiderman originally was Peter Parker, a nerdy science geek who ultimately became the best version of what he was created to be and to discover that with great power comes great responsibility. For this sermon series I have been reading this book.

**SLIDE      The Gospel According to Superheroes: Religion and Pop Culture (Graphic)**

It's been fun to learn about some of the origins of these superhero characters. When Stan Lee developed Spiderman it was meant to be a paradigm of the Golden Rule and so throughout the different episodes of the original book series, we find Peter Parker wrestling with treating others as he would like himself be treated. This requires practice and the making of a superhero is about acknowledging that you have this gift and then living it out to the best of your ability, sometimes falling short and sometimes doing more than you could ever ask or imagine.

Those with gifts in any arena of life realized that the more they practice them the more they are able to use them effectively. Malcolm Gladwell's talks about this in his best-selling book:

**SLIDE      Outliers: The story of success (Graphic)**



Gladwell discovered that those who succeed practice more than anyone else, even though they may have natural gifts in that area. The idea is that anyone can become an expert if they apply 10,000 hours to something they do very well. The making of someone who is extraordinary takes 10,000 hours which means lots of practice. Putting in that kind of time can make you great. We recognize that it's about practice, practice and then we practice some more.

We often have this thing about practice. We say practice makes... perfect. But does practice really make perfect? I have preached entire sermons on the truth that practice doesn't make perfect, but practice makes progress. That's why we practice and practice and practice some more. To become an expert in whatever God has gifted you to do takes practice.

To give you an idea of how much 10,000 hours of practice is, if you practice one hour a day it will take you 27 years, 139 days to getting your 10,000 hours. If you're willing to give two hours of your time per day it will require 13 years, 252 days. Three hours a day will take you 9 years, 46 days. If you're willing to give up four hours a day to practicing your gifts, it will take you 6 years, 308 days to become an expert superhero.

What we know is that God gives us with this extraordinary power. God has said that we will achieve things more than we can imagine or ask for, but he calls us to do our part and practice. This is where we better be careful what we ask for. One of my favorite movie lines comes from the movie, "Evan Almighty," where Morgan Freeman's caricature of God is talking to someone and reminds them to be careful what they pray for. "If you pray for patience then God will give you the opportunity to practice." We become a patient person by learning to practice patience, not by magically being better at it because we have prayed. It takes time and it takes effort.

So here's my question for you.

**SLIDE      Are you practicing?**

Are you willing to give hours of your time for God's transformative power to work in your life? Are you willing to give your time and practice to become like Christ? If you are willing to practice, God promises that extraordinary things will happen. We will be able to do even greater things than Christ according to Jesus himself. We will be able to experience more than we could ever ask for or imagine. We see this in the Scriptures over and over again as heroes of the faith are imperfect persons who practice and practice and practice some more.

One of my favorite New Testament heroes is Mary, one of the disciples who follows Jesus. The first time we meet Mary is with her sister Martha. They were always together and they were sisters but they were opposites when it came to their personalities. The first time we meet them in a suburb of Jerusalem at their home in Bethany. Mary and Martha are welcoming Jesus as their dinner guest into their home. Martha meets Jesus at the door and greets him with extravagant hospitality. The moment Jesus steps inside Martha begins to work preparing supper. She sets the table and does everything to make Jesus feel welcome and at home.

Mary however sets everything aside. She immediately runs to where Jesus is and falls at his feet. She stays and listens intently. Martha chastises her sister Mary but Jesus applauds her and praises her for choosing to relax and sit at his feet. This is the first time we meet Mary.

The second time we meet Mary is in John 11 as she and Martha are distraught because their brother is ill. They sent for Jesus but he doesn't come. By the time Jesus arrives they are mourning the loss of their brother Lazarus. Lazarus has died and in fact he has been dead for four days, inside of the tomb. Mary and Martha rush to Jesus and Martha says, "If only you had been here, it would be different. You had the power to save him but you didn't come."

Jesus listens to Martha and then he asks for Mary. Mary comes and again puts herself at the feet of Jesus and she also asked why he didn't come. Mary and Martha asked the very same question that many of us ask when faced with death and illness, "God, where are you?"

Jesus experiences their grief and he weeps. If you want to know where Jesus is when we are struggling with death and illness and deep questions of faith, we find the answer right here in John 11. His heart is troubled and he grieves with us. He longs for us to know in those moments that the worst thing in our lives will never be last thing in our lives.

As Mary comes to the feet of Jesus, Jesus is moved with compassion and he does the unthinkable. He reveals who he is as the resurrection and the life. We get to see the full strength of his power as he raises Lazarus from the dead. He reveals that he has the power to overcome death with life, to overcome darkness with light and to overcome despair with hope.

What you are meant to understand in the context of the gospel of John is that this story of the raising of Lazarus signals the beginning of the end of Jesus'

earthly life. Jesus is now a threat to every leader and every religious tradition that says they hold the keys to life and death because Jesus reveals through the raising of Lazarus that every single one of us, through Jesus Christ, will be raised from the dead. He can no longer hide because now every Roman and Pharisee and Zealot will be out to get him.

After leaving Bethany for a short time they return to the house of Martha and Mary and we see this same scene unfold for a third time. Martha what began greets Jesus and his busy hosting. She prepares the meal and she prepares the table and the disciples take their place. Lazarus is there in a daze, wondering what life will be like in its 2.0 version. Martha brings the meal and they are all gathered except for Mary who is nowhere to be found. She has disappeared which seems to be par for the course for Mary. When there is work to be done, she is somewhere else.

Barbara Brown Taylor describes Mary has, ***"The kind of person who has the ability to disappear even when she is sitting right in front of you. She gets that lost look on her face that makes you think she is listening to music that no one else can hear. She has a blank stare that means she can see something that no one else can see. Mary always seems to disappear."***

Mary finally returns, coming late to the dinner gathering. She comes in with no words but with a clear singular purpose, bearing a gift. She holds in her hands a jar of perfume, anointing oil. She snaps the neck of the perfume bottle and falls at the feet of Jesus. The perfume covers the stench of an impending death and she anoints Jesus with her oil and her hair. This is meant to remind us and the disciples that Jesus is a King. The word "Messiah" means, "the anointed one." Mary uses her hair and the oil to clean Jesus' feet.

Everyone questions Mary and her actions. Jesus responds by asking why she broke open the bottle of perfume that could've been used to fetch some money and feed the poor. Those who recognize she was anointing Jesus wondered why she was doing so to his feet, and not his head because that is how you are claimed and known as King. They wanted to proclaim his power and lift them up as the King of Kings. Why did Mary fall at his feet?

Mary falls at the feet of Jesus because she knew what she was doing. She had practiced this before. Jesus knew what she was doing as well, because only one kind of man would get his feet anointed and that is the dead kind. Jesus tells the others to stand back and allow Mary to proclaim your message because she has been practicing falling at the feet of Jesus. It doesn't matter whether she is

entertaining guests. She is still at the feet of Jesus. It doesn't matter if her brother is dead and has been gone for four days. She is at the feet of Jesus. It doesn't matter that fear is surrounding the entire dinner group and that death is impending. She is at the feet of Jesus.

She falls at the feet of Jesus as a way of announcing that he is the Messiah who will conquer death. She literally lives into the fulfillment of the greatest commandment that Jesus hasn't even proclaimed to his disciples, "That greater love has no one than this but to lay down their life for another. You shall love as I first loved you. I command you to love one another."

The practical faith of Mary became instinctive because she had been practicing. No one could have imagined that it would be a woman who would be the first to reveal who Christ is in a world dominated by men. This is what it looks like to become a superhero. It requires understanding that you have been given a gift and you are called to practice it everywhere that you go with unwavering persistence. When you are able to practice this faith, things happen that you can't even imagine or dream of and Mary embodies this kind of faith.

One of you lovely church members got me a subscription to GQ magazine recently. I have no idea actually how I started receiving it but now it comes to the church office. I was bemoaning this because the latest issue had a very scantily clad woman on the cover and I thought it looked pretty bad that the senior pastor was getting this in his mailbox. But the articles really are pretty good!

#### **SLIDE      Suicide Catcher Chen See (Graphic)**

I recently read about this man that you see in the video screen, Chen See. His brother took his own life on the Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge that you see in the background. He felt called to move out of this darkness by his Christian faith but wasn't sure what he could do. He looked out upon the bridge every day and he wanted to do something and so he began to simply walk across the bridge, back-and-forth. Every day, in the morning and in the afternoon in the evening, he walks the bridge and he sits below the bridge with a pair of binoculars. In China, over 250,000 people a year are successful in taking their own life. Chen See wanted to be there in the midst of those moments so he simply started walking this bridge.

Over the last 15 years he has saved over 300 people just by walking this bridge back-and-forth. He is known as the "suicide catcher." He has purchased a hotel room next to the bridge and he invites people to that room when he finds

them on the bridge to meet with counselors that he is hired so they might care for the souls of people who have no hope and who walked through darkness. In the midst of their darkest moments he shines the light. He practices his faith daily as he walks the bridge and shines the life-saving power of Christ. He is saving lives by practicing his faith. That is what it looks like when we talk about the making of a superhero.

Maybe you noticed that the article on this character at last year's Super Bowl.

**SLIDE      Michael Wheeler Superman Running (Graphic)**

Michael Wheeler is the Superman of midtown and he loves to run. He runs around the streets on a daily basis and many years back he decided to wear a Superman costume. We all know that if you run into Superman costume then you will run faster and farther and you will be better at running! He found that in wearing the costume people off and waved at him and they would want to stop and talk to him on the streets.

**SLIDE      Michael Wheeler Jesus Superman (Graphic)**

He discovered that he could share his story of why he does what he does with everyone he encounters. He took the "S" off of his costume and he put a "J" on it and began to write things like, "faith, hope, joy, life," on his cape. Every time he is stopped by someone he shares the good news of Jesus Christ and the power that fuels him and inspires him. It is the power that gives them the ability to run every day with perseverance, the race that is set before him.

**SLIDE      Jesus Saves Football (Graphic)**

What's interesting is that while he runs he prays and he carries his football with him every Super Bowl as he runs around the Stadium and prays. His results may not be as measurable as Chen See but news and media outlets do stories about him and I can guarantee you he never imagined or dreamed of those things when he first started. He understands the gift he has been given and he has the courage to practice it daily, to the end that people might find life and love.

This is what it looks like to become a superhero.

Last Fourth of July weekend there was a visiting family who lost a child serving in the military several years ago. It was a devastating loss for them and they still have deep grief, but one of the things that sustains them are the notes they received from others during that time. They still keep those notes and they

get them out on days like July 4. One of the notes came from a perfect stranger named Bob who decided many years ago that his gift was writing letters of encouragement and hope. He is confined to a wheelchair and he can't get out much but his faith compels him to do something, to practice what it means to be Jesus Christ to the world. Bob looks for obituaries of young men and women who have died serving in the military and he simply writes to their family and thank them and encourages them to hold on even when it's dark. He wants them to know that he appreciates their sacrifice and their loss as parents and spouses and children who have lost someone willing to serve.

What gift has God given you? We know that we have been gifted with the power to do extraordinary things. We have been gifted to do the things that Christ did, and even greater things, by the power of the Holy Spirit. If we receive that love fully, we know that by his work in us we are able to accomplish far more than anything we can ask or imagine. Christ implores us to show up and to practice. Get out and do those things, even if they might seem small and insignificant, because you never know what God can use in our daily habits.

All it takes is practice – practicing using those gifts so you can change the world and be the presence of Christ to others. My prayer is that you would begin to uncover whatever your gift might be and you would put it to use. We have a staff person here the church whose main job is to equip you and help you discover that gift. What drives you? What compels you? How can you use your gifts to the end that you might be a blessing to others as you seek to be the presence of Jesus Christ the world?

**SLIDE        Communion**