

“The Battle Between Good and Evil”  
Theme: The Making of a Superhero  
Scripture: John 1:1-5, 9

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

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Meditation Moments for Monday, July 21 – Read Joshua 2:1-20, 6:22-25, Matthew 1:5 – As the Israelite people moved into Canaan, Joshua sent two spies to study the strategic city of Jericho. Rahab, a Canaanite woman, sheltered and protected the men, even though they were “enemies” of her people. In return, she asked them to spare her and her family when the city fell, and they did. But there was more—her action led to her becoming one of Jesus’ ancestors, wrote the gospel writer Matthew.

- At first Rahab explained her actions pragmatically: “I know that the Lord has given you the land. Terror over you has overwhelmed us” (Joshua 2:9). Then she added, “This is because the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on earth below” (verse 11). When have you seen God work through a specific, tangible concern (e.g. an illness, family crisis or financial reverse) to lead you or someone close to you to greater faith?
- Matthew 1:5 may sound pretty dull. But it was amazing. Matthew named four women, including Rahab, in his list of Jesus’ family tree, at least three of whom (maybe all four) were Gentiles. What was Matthew saying about God by listing these unexpected names which would have stood out to his readers? How can we avoid writing off today’s “Rahabs” as of no value to God’s kingdom?  
Prayer: Lord God, the Bible doesn’t explain how your Spirit prepared Rahab’s heart for her part in your story—but there she was. Keep my heart open to you, and to the presence of others through whom you are at work. Amen.

Tuesday, July 22– Read Jonah 1:1-3, 3:1-10, 4:1-3, 10-11 - Jonah ran the other way when God called. He ran, not due to fear, but because God was sending him to

preach in Nineveh, a city Jonah hated. The story describes some pretty dramatic measures to get Jonah to carry out God's call, including three days in the belly of a "great fish" (Jonah 1:17). Jonah wasn't much of a hero, but God's mercy worked heroically even through that very reluctant prophet to reach the people of Nineveh.

- Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which before Babylon was the dominant empire in the Middle East. History tells us that the Assyrians were brutal and destructive to the peoples they conquered, including the northern kingdom of Israel. Can you relate at all to the anger Jonah expressed when God forgave these brutal enemies of his people "just" because they repented? Are there people today that you would rather God didn't offer mercy and forgiveness to?

- Jonah's story underlined an important truth for studying the Bible's prophecies: they were warnings and promises, not unalterable statements of destiny (cf. Jeremiah 18:7-10). Jonah said Nineveh would be overthrown, but it wasn't (at least, not then). How do you feel about serving a God who alters his plans depending on how people respond to his message? When has God's mercy been a welcome message to you?

Prayer: God of grace, thank you for sending warning messages about the results of persistently turning away from your pathway. Thank you even more for the mercy that always welcomes us when we turn back toward you. Amen.

Wednesday, July 23— Read Matthew 9:9-12, Luke 19:1-10- Jesus' message and ministry often surprised people, and seemed illogical, unpredictable, even undesirable to some. Today we read that he called Zacchaeus and Matthew, who were tax collectors. The "tax collectors" in Jesus' day were Jews who got rich helping the Roman occupiers. Most Israelites hated them as traitors and cheats. Yet Jesus bravely welcomed them into his kingdom, and even invited them into his mission.

- Jews in Jesus' day expected God to send a political and military hero, the Messiah, to free them from Roman occupation. Jesus' ministry simply didn't fit that idea. Calling Matthew was an example—Jesus called a despised "tax collector," and made him a messenger of salvation. Matthew changed many lives, particularly by writing the Gospel of Matthew. Have you ever been surprised by any of the things God has done in your life? Has any part of your spiritual journey seemed illogical to you or others?

- In Luke 19:10, Jesus said he "came to seek and save the lost." Scholar William Barclay wrote, "In the New Testament 'lost' does not mean damned or doomed. It just means in the wrong place ... A man is lost when he has wandered

away from God; and he is found when once again he takes his rightful place as an obedient child in the ... family of his Father.” Were you ever “lost”? If so, in what ways did God help you be “found”? How can you join God in helping others who are lost find their way home?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the world’s greatest hero. Thank you for coming “to seek and to save the lost,” including me. Help me to join you in doing that. Amen.

Thursday, July 24 – Read John 3:1-18, Luke 7:36-50- The religious group called the Pharisees (from a Hebrew word meaning “set apart”) doggedly opposed Jesus’ ministry. At times, Jesus expressed anger at their hard-hearted brand of “righteousness” (cf. Mark 3:5). He never wrote them all off as “enemies” or “hopeless,” though. Whenever he found a Pharisee with any willingness to listen to him, he reached out in love.

- Nicodemus, the Pharisee who came to Jesus by night, reappears in the gospel story. He spoke up against others who wanted to pass judgment on Jesus without ever really giving him a hearing (cf. John 7:51). He helped give Jesus’ body an honorable burial after the crucifixion (cf. John 19:39). Have you, or someone you know, at first held back from following Jesus, but gradually grown into acceptance of his offer of new life, as Nicodemus apparently did?

- We never hear about Simon the Pharisee again in Jesus’ story. Despite his grudgingly correct answer to Jesus’ parable (Luke 7:43), it seems likely that he could never get past his distaste for a man willing to accept a woman who was a “sinner” (verse 40). Was it a waste of time for Jesus to accept Simon’s invitation to dine at his house? How willing are you to “go the extra mile” to share Jesus’ love with someone who may or may not choose to respond to that love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you didn’t limit your attention to your friends, or to the “most likely prospects” for your kingdom. Give me more of your willingness to connect even with people who think very differently than I do. Amen.

Friday, July 25 – Read Luke 10:25-37, 17:11-19- Hatred and suspicion between the Israelites and the neighboring people of Samaria had roots that reached back over 500 years, to Israel’s return from exile in Babylon (cf. Ezra 4:1-5). Jesus’ fellow Jews saw Samaritans the way many Israelis today see Palestinians—and vice versa. In contrast, Jesus saw Samaritans as just people who needed his love as much as everyone else, and he treated them accordingly.

- In his book *America Aflame*, historian David Goldfield showed how abolitionists and slave owners before the Civil War refused to consider that there could be anything good about anyone on the opposite side of the issue. Those feelings led to a war that killed some 600,000 young men. What fears and inner insecurities can blind us to the humanity we share with people from other nations

or other points of view? How can God's love for all people start to build bridges across seemingly unbridgeable divides?

- The man in the story in Luke 17 faced a double problem: he was not only a Samaritan, but a leper. Jesus consistently refused to follow the taboos against contact with either group. Here he healed all ten lepers, and praised the Samaritan for having a greater spirit of gratitude. Have you ever reached across your own discomfort or distaste, and found admirable qualities in a person you'd have been tempted to shun?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give me the inner courage to recognize who are the "Samaritans" and the "lepers" in my world. Then give me the courage to love them with your love. Amen.

Saturday, July 26 – Read Matthew 15:21-28, Ephesians 2:11-14- The names "Tyre" and "Sidon" may not register with us at first. But when we study a map of ancient Israel, we realize that Jesus had gone well outside the boundaries of Israel, into modern Lebanon, when he met the Canaanite woman and healed her child. His example in episodes like that, as well as his commission to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), sent his followers on a mission to continue his work of tearing down all the ethnic and other walls by which we humans divide ourselves from one another.

- Jesus' disciples wanted him to send the Canaanite woman away (Matthew 15:23). Some scholars suggest that Jesus' seemingly harsh comments to her were a parody of the disciples' attitudes, and that he may have made the remarks with a twinkle in his eye that emboldened the woman to press her plea. When has Jesus brought healing to strained and broken relationships in your life? How can Jesus' example, and the message of Ephesians 2, help us to shine the light of hope and reconciliation into even the darkest places of human brokenness and mistrust?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are our peace. With your body you broke down the barriers of hatred that divide us. Give us your power to live as healing heroes in our broken world. Amen.

Family Activity: Give each person in your family paper and crayons or colored pencils. Ask each person to create a superhero. Invite them to give their superhero any physical, mental, emotional or spiritual qualities or characteristics they imagine as useful. When everyone is finished, ask each person to introduce his/her superhero to the rest of the family. When all have shared, talk about why they chose specific qualities or characteristics. Do they admire those in someone else? Do they wish they had them? What characteristics of a superhero do God

and Jesus display? After the sharing, are there any qualities or characteristics they'd like to add to their superhero? Display the superheroes as reminders to be superheroes yourselves. Pray and ask God to help you continue to grow more like him.

***Theme: The Making of a Superhero***  
**"The Battle Between Good and Evil"**

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

July 19-20, 2014 at First United Methodist Church, Durango

**Scripture: John 1:1-5, 9**

*1 In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He existed in the beginning with God. 3 God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. 4 The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

*9 The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.*

**VIDEO      Superhero Week 4 Sermon Starter**

**SLIDE      The Battle Between Good and Evil**

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.

Two weeks 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. One piece of trivia I found fascinating is that one out of every three soldiers who headed overseas to serve in World War II carried with them a comic book of some sort that features superheroes. We have also learned that many of the superhero characters are modeled after biblical figures in the Old Testament.

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. I once again had some great pictures you all have been sending me like this one from Kenzie Hoffman reminding me that not all superheroes are men!

**SLIDE        Kenzie Hoffman (Graphic)**

As we continue in this sermon series let's remember that we are talking about the ingredients of a superhero. This series is called, "The Making of a Superhero," because we are asking what it takes for us to claim that as people of faith. We started by looking at how we can uncover the power that each of us have within us. While we might not have the typical superpowers that you see in a superhero movie, we recognize that God has gifted each one of us as we are claimed by the Holy Spirit. We receive power through the grace of Jesus Christ and some of us have the power to encourage others. Some of us have the power to teach. Some of us have the power to heal. Some of us have the power to lead. Some of us have the power to serve. Some of us have the power to make others feel welcome. These are all gifts of the Holy Spirit and we are meant to use them.

That first week we remembered when Jesus looked at his disciples and he breathed on them with his Holy Spirit. He said to them just before his death that those who believed in him and followed him would do even greater works than he did. The apostle Paul said that we could do more than we could ever ask or imagine as we follow Jesus Christ and believe that he lives within us. Paul told the people of Ephesus that they were going to do far more than they could ask or imagine because of the power of the Holy Spirit living within. That first week I asked you a question.

## **SLIDE      Do you believe?**

Do you believe you have that power living within you?

Two weeks ago we looked at another component of the making of a superhero. It's not enough just to believe and know that you have that superpower. You also have to put that into practice. We recognized that every superhero has this moment where they are trying to get the hang of their powers. The reality is the practice does not make perfect. What does practice make? Practice makes progress, so we practice, practice and practice some more. The questions I asked you last week was...

## **SLIDE      Are you practicing?**

Are you working at your faith? When we say yes to Jesus Christ that is only the beginning of our faith journey, or a new beginning. We call that the moment of Justification. But then we continue to practice our faith and it is an up and down journey. We try and we make mistakes and then we are honest about messing up and we start over again. That process of practicing and trying and failing and trying again is called Sanctification, which is about becoming more like Christ. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, talked about this as Holiness or going onto perfection. We don't get there, but we keep practicing and practicing and practicing some more.

Last week we talked about how many superhero characters are adopted and they had people who chose to invest in them. Batman had Alfred, while Spiderman had Uncle Ben and Aunt Mae and Superman had Jonathan and Martha Kent. We have people who have poured into our lives and we are called to pour into the lives of others. I left you with this question.

## **SLIDE      Who are you choosing?**

Who are you choosing to invest in? Who are you helping to see that they are more than what they can see in themselves? We all need that. Even if we didn't get that from our biological parents, we are people who adopted into God's family and so we invest in others, especially future generations.

Today we continue this series by looking at how superheroes are willing to face enemies and overcome evil. What binds superheroes together is this willingness to overcome and to face these supervillains. The Incredible Hulk is one my favorite superheroes. He begins as Bruce Banner, a scientist looking to cure disease, but when an experiment goes very wrong he is injected with large amounts of gamma rays. Now, when he becomes angered or enraged and his



heart rate goes above 170 he becomes this large green beast.

In the 2008 film version the enemy is a man who has injected himself with large amounts of Gamma radiation because he wants the power of the Hulk. He even says that he wants to be god-like, but it goes terribly wrong and he becomes this ugly hulk gone bad lizard looking thing that is terrorizing Harlem in New York City. Let's see what happens...

#### **VIDEO      The Hulk 2008**

Superheroes are ordinary people who end up with extraordinary gifts and to use those gifts to fight evil, and more importantly to overcome these villains that seem insurmountable. As we think about what it takes to make a superhero we need to be honest about the world we live in and be willing to look at evil.

The earliest comic book superheroes faced real life evil, real life issues and real life villains. Wonder Woman was the only main female superhero and she lived in a male-dominated culture. Her character was created to fight back against the lives of her teenage. She fought against modern-day inequality with the lasso of truth. You couldn't escape the lasso of truth, not even Superman.

#### **SLIDE      Wonder Woman and Superman (Graphic)**

She had a tiara. It was a weapon that she could throw. Her wristbands stop bullets and other cool things.

#### **SLIDE      Wonder Woman (Graphic)**

Wonder Woman only had one way that she could be stopped, and that was to use her wristbands as handcuffs. If you could get those wristbands to touch then they would become handcuffs and that was meant to be a metaphor for women feeling handcuffed by their roles in that day, shackled by gender inequalities and stereotypes. Wonder Woman is actually going to show up next summer with Superman and Batman in a new superhero movie. Can you imagine that—a new superhero movie coming out next summer? Unbelievable isn't it?

Early comic book heroes fought Hitler and the Nazis. Some wrestled with the Ku Klux Klan while others battled communism. You saw them daily challenging real life evil and villains and the idea was that we could read their stories and find hope and live differently. Over the course of time those villains changed and they became fictitious figures that represent things like anger and malice and slander and envy and pride and jealousy. What made superheroes super was their ability to overcome the unsurmountable obstacles represented by villains and evil.



You know what many of these look like because you have seen the movies, but let's remember what these villains appear like. Let's take see how many you can recognize from the photo.

**SLIDE          Superhero Villains (Graphic)**

In that photo you might recognize the Joker or Cat Woman or the Scarecrow. They all look a bit different and they all have different issues when it comes to the kind of evil they reflect, and that is on purpose because the truth is evil takes different forms in our world.

In the Scriptures, evil also has a shifting picture and different outward appearances. When we talk about the idea of evil and the epic battle between good and evil that we find described in Scripture, we often talk about the devil or Satan. These terms come from a Hebrew word.

**SLIDE          *ha-Satan* = "accuser"**

The literal translation from the Hebrew for this idea of Satan is, "accuser," or "liar," or, "thief." The name has multiple meanings and we see this figure play out over the course of history. We first encountered this evil, breathy whisper in the garden. Outwardly it looks like a serpent and it whispers in the ear of the first humans and says, "You can be God." The serpent speaks words that cause us to stray. The serpent lies to us and tries to convince us that we are not God's children and we are not worthy of love. The voice tries to convince us of darkness and doubt and those old tapes play over and over in our head, deceiving us and pulling us away from who we truly are.

We next meet this character of ha-Satan in Daniel and it's represented as the sea monster who is just as imposing as a serpent. We need Aquaman to fight off this evil. In Isaiah ha-Satan looks like a fallen Angel and we see yet another version of what this bill it looks like. We see multiple accounts of evil and the enemy throughout Scripture, not unlike that cast of characters that we saw earlier.

If we are to figure out what it takes to become a superhero in today's world, then it's important for us to name evil. We have to ask what our enemy is and how we might defeat it, so we're clear on what it looks like to overcome. While it may look different in different situations and under different circumstances, we must acknowledge that evil is very real or evil wins. Remember that one of the defining characteristics of ha-Satan is that it is a liar and integrated slide is convincing you that it's not real.

We do know about evil is that it stands in opposition to all that is good. It stands in opposition to superheroes. Ha-Satan stands in opposition of God and everything that God has created. This is the description that we find in John's gospel as he tells us about Jesus coming into the world. Remember that in John's gospel the birth narrative of Jesus is very different, setting the stage for the cosmic battle between evil and the ultimate superhero in Jesus Christ. Jesus would later talk to his disciples about evil in John chapter 10:10.

**SLIDE        *10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.***

Regardless of what the enemy looks like, Jesus tells us that the enemy comes for things like death and destruction while he comes for life that is abundant. The Scriptures evil is defined as what death is to life or what darkness is to light or what emptiness is to being full. Evil is the opposite of all that is good that is in God's creation. Evil is the deprivation of creation which came from God. Evil is the absence of goodness and the absence of God.

The ancient church fathers and mothers talked about evil in this way. Maximus the Confessor writes these words.

**SLIDE        *"If by nature the good unifies and holds together what has been separated, evil clearly divides and corrupts what has been unified. For evil is by nature dispersive, unstable, multiform and divisive."***

He agreed with Thomas Aquinas who said this about evil.

**SLIDE        *"Evil at its source is the absence or deprivation of good—it is the deprivation of one's thoughts on God."***

Aquinas believed that evil was emptiness in the absence of good and the absence of God. It's as darkness is to light. It's as death is to life. If God is everything then evil is nothing.

The problem is that doesn't seem like a very powerful picture of evil or like the evil that we face when we are walking through darkness. Suffering feels very real when you are in the midst of it. When we encounter painful hurts it certainly doesn't feel like nothing, but it feels like something big has overwhelmed us. How could evil possibly be nothing?

This description of evil as emptiness is actually very frightening because emptiness and loneliness and feeling isolated can be some of the most powerful pain we have ever experienced. Nothing, when it surrounds us, is often more painful than anything we can imagine. It's much more painful than the Joker or

the green goblin or whatever comic book villain we might be facing. It is actually more like the evil that we see in the Harry Potter book series which has Dementors that show up and suck the life out of you so there is nothing but darkness left.

Let's think about this in more practical terms. How many of you have ever driven on the roads here in Durango in the springtime after the snow has melted? The roads are nice and smooth aren't they? No, they are not! They're actually are many places where there is a deprivation of concrete and we call those places potholes. When you're driving along and expecting to have something there and then there is a hole in the road, it can cause some damage to your car or your tire. Sometimes emptiness is painful and results in real damage. I would suggest to you that life is full of potholes where sometimes it feels as if the bottom is dropped out and you lunge forward and you lunge back and there are dents and sometimes puncture wounds.

The last two weeks we have been painting our house and a number of you have helped. We have several levels to our house and so we have had to use ladders, some of which are extension ladders which go very high. I was imagining going down one of the ladders and wondering what would happen if a rung was missing. If you put your foot where a rung should be and there isn't one, what would happen? What if there was absence in a place that you were expecting presents? What if there was emptiness when you were expecting something to be there?

Have you ever been going downstairs in the darkness? Have you ever tried to take that last step and realized it wasn't the last step? What usually happens? Usually there is pain and suffering involved as we tumble to the ground. You can have a moment of fear as you wonder when the last step is going to come. Sometimes when we expect something to be there and it isn't, we are talking about emptiness or evil as the absence of nothing, we are actually talking about something that can cause great pain.

I have often told this story on the golf course, shortly after I meet somebody and they discover after the fifth hole that I'm a pastor. They find themselves wondering about any words they might've said in the previous four holes and I want to put their mind at ease so I tell them about the pastor who decided to go golfing one Sunday morning. He was supposed to preach and so we called his associate pastor and faked being sick. The associate pastor agreed to preach and so the pastor went out, very excited to play because it was a beautiful

morning.

As he began his round, the devil turned to God and said, "Hey, that's one of your servants. Are you just going to let him lie and skip Sunday services and play golf today?"

God responded, "I have it covered. Don't worry about."

The pastor went on to have the round of his life and with several strokes under par coming into the last hole. The devil was flabbergasted and once again turned to God and said, "What do you think you're doing? How can you let them get away with that?"

God again replied, "It will be fine. I have it under control."

On the final hole, which was a long par three, the pastor hit his tee shot and it bounced once and dropped into the hole for hole-in-one. The devil turned to God in disgust and said, "That's just ridiculous! I don't know what you're thinking but how can you allow a man of the cloth to have such an amazing round of golf after lying and not going to worship you?"

God simply said, "Who is he going to tell?"

Have you ever had a mountaintop experience like a promotion or some other amazing moment in life? You get on the phone and you try to contact people who will celebrate with you and nobody answers. You go to your neighbor's house who is a good friend and no one is home. In the midst of celebration, when you wanted to share that with somebody, what would it feel like if nobody was there to share it with you? It was empty and you were all alone wouldn't that hurt just a bit?

Even worse, in those moments when we walk through the valleys of the shadow of death and we are going to darkness and we experience what feels like an insurmountable enemy or obstacle, and you find yourself alone. All you want to do is talk to somebody or even have somebody just sit with you. One of the main things our Stephen Ministers do here in this congregation is simply sit with people as they go through tough stuff. I had someone tell me the other day they were going through a difficult moment in life with their teenage child how powerful it was to simply sit with an older woman who had been through many years earlier. They didn't even have to say anything, but they just sat together and were not alone in the emptiness.

When you want to lay your head on someone's shoulder and there is no shoulder, it can feel hopeless. Sometimes emptiness can cause the worst kind of

pain. As we think about defining evil we must recognize that it is the deprivation of good and all that is of God. Evil feels like Gotham when the bat signal doesn't work or even worse, when you give the bat signal and Batman doesn't show. Evil looks like Metropolis when Superman is suffering from exposure to kryptonite.

Evil is the deprivation of hope. Evil is the deprivation of God's goodness and mercy.

As we read Scriptures, especially the Gospels, we begin to see the answer and the antidote to evil. We see God's answer to overcoming the emptiness. Jesus is that answer in the gospel of John describes this in powerful poetry and metaphor. Jesus is the answer to brokenness and emptiness and darkness. Last week we read the beginning of the gospel of Matthew which begins with the genealogy of Jesus and in the story of his birth to Mary and Joseph. But in John's gospel we find Jesus as the answer to nothingness. We read this in John's gospel.

**SLIDE      *1 In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He existed in the beginning with God. 3 God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. 4 The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.***

Darkness is nothing more than the deprivation of the light and John's gospel reminds us that he can never overcome light because when there is light there can be no darkness. This light comes into the world through Jesus Christ which means the darkness will always be conquered. Jesus Christ means that the worst thing in your life will never be the last thing in your life. Christ becomes for the world the light which overwhelms all darkness.

The moment you light a candle, darkness hides. John described Jesus as this answer to the darkness. Jesus renders the darkness obsolete because he is the light of the world. We experienced this at candlelight Christmas Eve services and so let me be the first to invite you to Christmas Eve on December 23 or December 24 in 2014. At the end of each service we extinguish all of the candles and we turn off all the lights. We remember that it was dark and there are moments when we feel that way today, when evil seems to surround us and brings us fear.

We put ourselves in that darkness so that we can truly experience the power of the light of Christ. We sit together in the darkness and we watched this one, solitary candle begin to light up the room. Immediately the darkness recedes and we experience the power of the light of Christ. We understand what it means

to overcome all of these things which seemed insurmountable. There is great power we see the light of Christ begin to fill the room. That light becomes magnified when we choose to pass it on to the next person and share it. That light is meant to radiate the entire world to reach one of you as you seek to be the presence of Jesus Christ.

We see the promises of God begin to fill those places where there has been emptiness. Christmas Eve is meant to be this mountaintop moment where we experience, in a very tangible way, the light of Christ which can overcome anything we might be facing any darkness we might encounter.

Jesus is not just the light of the world but also promises to bring us life. We read this in John 11. Jesus is talking to Martha in this story that we heard a couple of weeks ago about the raising of Lazarus, who was the brother to Mary and Martha.

**SLIDE      *25 Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. 26 Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"***

This is why at Easter we celebrate that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus is the living Christ who tramples over the grave and brings life out of death. We acknowledge that Jesus has the light and life to overcome even death. Death is nothing more than the deprivation of life and so when Jesus rises from the grave he makes death no longer a final darkness but instead a step into a new life with God. Death is nothing when compared to the life and resurrection offered by Christ.

This is why I preached these words at Blaine Thomson's funeral this past week and why I'll preach them in the two funerals we are doing in the coming weeks, because this life is not the end. We don't need to fear death and that changes everything. Remember that the thief comes to destroy and kill but Christ comes to offer us life that is abundant in full. It is a life that has power even over death.

When I think about these promises from God that Jesus is the light of the world and the life that overcome death, I wonder why it is that we have any fear of all? Why do we have fear in the face of our enemies or in the face of darkness or obstacles that seemed insurmountable? Christ offers us all that we want or need in life everlasting. Christ offers us hope which means we should be rejoicing always and everywhere, except that we aren't. Why?

I don't know about you, but I don't always feel like I do when I read Easter Sunday morning or Christmas Eve. Why is it that we don't always carry this feeling of fulfillment and joy and hope with us where we go? Sometimes it feels like evil is caving in upon us and the world is getting worse. Sometimes we have these moments we feel like the Joker might actually be Batman or Lex Luther might overwhelm Superman. Why do we sometimes enter into these moments of fear or darkness or desperation?

I think the answer is pretty simple. We forget. I think we forget the story and we listen to the liar and the accuser and the deceiver who tells us the wrong story. We listen to the voice that whispers in our ear, "You can be God. You're better than everyone else. You're no good. You're not special. You're a fool. You're going to die and there's nothing you can do about it. You are not loved by anyone."

If darkness is the deprivation of light and death is the deprivation of life then forgetting is the deprivation of remembering. We forget who we are and whose we are which is why we need to be in worship every weekend. When we forget we begin to wonder and we enter once again into darkness and forget we have the ultimate weapon for fighting evil and that is light and life and hope which goes beyond this life.

This is why Jesus in the Gospels is always reminding his disciples, "I will go with you always, even until the end of the age." We are called to remember the words of Psalm 23 which we say almost every funeral, "Even though I walk through the Valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, because you are with me God."

So here's my question for you today as we look at the making of a superhero. Do you remember who you are and whose you are?

**SLIDE      Do You Remember Who and Whose You Are?**

This is why we celebrate the Lord's Supper every month together and we take the bread and we take the juice because Jesus said whenever you eat and drink, remember. "Remember me, because nothing can ever separate me from you." I'm reminded of the words in Luke's gospel, chapter 21 when Jesus is about to be arrested.

**SLIDE      *33 Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.***

Shortly after this Judas, the Scripture tells us, was filled with ha-Satan and



he sold his friend out for a few pieces of silver. What happened to Judas? He was lied to and he forgot. He forgot about what it meant to be a follower and a companion and a friend. He forgot that Jesus was light and life, and he even got to see it all in person! What resulted was death and darkness and betrayal.

Do you remember who you are and whose you are? Jesus urges us to remember because he knows we can be forgetful as humans. This brings us to the last question I want to ask you today.

**SLIDE        Are you willing to fight for what is good?**

Superheroes fight for what is good. Are you willing to do that? John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, gave early Methodists three simple rules. We have preached a sermon series on those rules here before but those rules are key and they remind us of this battle between good and evil.

**SLIDE        Wesley's Three Rules (Graphic)**

**Do no harm; avoid every kind of evil.**

Earlier this spring you may have heard the story of the young man who stopped the shooter at Seattle Pacific University. The student who died, Paul Lee, was a friend of Carl Sallee's. Carl is a member of this church, was active in our youth group and youth praise team and is now a student at SPU. Fellow student Joe Meis was the hero of that story. As the shooter was re-loading he jumped him armed only with pepper spray. Joe wrote this letter in the aftermath of the shooting.

*To my brothers and sisters at Seattle Pacific University, and my brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the nation and the world,*

*Words cannot come close to expressing the tragedy that occurred this past week on our campus. Like everyone else, I would hear of these horrible events on the news, but go home knowing that it could never happen to us. On Thursday, my life changed. I was thrown into a life and death situation, and through God's grace I was able to stop the attacker and walk away unharmed. As I try to return to a normal life in the aftermath of this horrible event, I pray above all things for strength for the victims and their families. While my experience left me in physical shock, I know that many people are dealing with much greater grief than I have experienced, and in honesty I probably would not be able to handle myself right now if I had personally known the victims.*

*I know that I am being hailed as a hero, and as many people have suggested I find this hard to accept. I am indeed a quiet and private individual; while I have*

*imagined what it would be like to save a life I never believed I would be put in such a situation. It touches me truly and deeply to read online that parents are telling their children about me and telling them that real heroes do exist.*

*However, what I find most difficult about this situation is the devastating reality that a hero cannot come without tragedy. In the midst of this attention, we cannot ignore that a life was taken from us, ruthlessly and without justification or cause. Others were badly injured, and many more will carry this event with them the rest of their lives. Nonetheless, I would encourage that hate be met with love. When I came face to face with the attacker, God gave me the eyes to see that he was not a faceless monster, but a very sad and troubled young man. While I cannot at this time find it within me to forgive his crime, I truly desire that he will find the grace of God and the forgiveness of our community.*

*I would like to truly thank the responders who secured the building and the medical staff who looked after myself and those who were injured. After being in this situation myself, it is even harder to imagine what it would be like to have a job where one's life is willingly put on the line every day. To our police, emergency responders, and armed forces, you have my greatest respect.*

*I am overwhelmed with the incredible generosity that has been showered upon me. It has been deeply touching to read the comments online and realize that my actions have had such a strikingly widespread effect. Moving forward, I am strongly requesting that any future donations be given to the victims through Seattle Pacific University.*

*I am grateful for the prayers and support coming from our home city and afar. In these next few days, weeks, and months, please continue to pray for everyone in the Seattle Pacific community. We serve a truly awesome God and I firmly believe that it is through Him alone that we will find the strength to heal from this tragedy.*

Could you or I do that? I don't know. But the person Joe was BEFORE being thrust into the position may have determined why he did it and why he was ABLE to be a hero in that moment. He remembered who he is.

The second of Wesley's rules is to: **Do all the good you can.**

#### **SLIDE      Wesley's Three Simply Rules (Graphic)**

There are many ways we can do this. I wanted you to see this cool news story I saw recently in which these members of a United Methodist Church in the state of Washington are Superheroes in and of themselves.

**VIDEO**      **Tiny Superheroes**

**SLIDE**      **Wesley's Three Simply Rules (Graphic)**

Wesley's final rule: **Stay in love with God.** Do you know why Wesley included this rule? Because it is not enough just to void evil and do good, otherwise you forget! So I ask you one more time.

**SLIDE**      **Do You Remember Who and Whose You Are?**

As we look at what it takes to be a superhero it looks like remembering the promises of Jesus Christ, which equips us with the ability to overcome anything we might imagine facing. The making of a superhero and overcoming evil requires that we remember. The making of a superhero is remembering who we are and whose we are so we can overcome death and darkness.

We are called to remember who we are so we can then help others remember who they are. We can help others discover this hope and this joy in this light in this life that came into the world with Jesus Christ. Our task is to help others remember they are never alone. This is what the apostle Paul reminds the earliest Christians in his letter to the Romans.

**SLIDE**      ***35 Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? 37 No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. 38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. 39 No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

It doesn't matter what we are traveling through or what we are facing, if we will remember the grace of God through Jesus Christ we have the power to overcome darkness with light and death with life. We are required simply to remember. This is part of the making of a superhero.

We give you the Meditation Moments and Message Notes so you can remember. This week you will read about unexpected heroes who overcome obstacles and remember who they are and whose they are. We have these personal pocket Bibles with a bookmark and Bible verses in them so you can

remember. We always invite you to take this and travel with them so you remember. Feel free to give them away so others can remember and then you can get another one.

We have a Congregational Care ministry this year so you would know that you are not facing anything alone. They will walk with you and comfort you and encourage you. They will assure you and remind you of the grace of Jesus Christ, that you have the ability to overcome. We have small groups and we had vacation Bible school this last week so our children would remember. Through all of these things and through our worship together we remember who we are and whose we are.

We remember that Christ is real and that the power of Christ is extraordinary. Christ gives us the gift of light and life that together we might go forth from this place being the presence of Christ in the world and sharing that with everyone that we meet to the end that we might create a whole world filled with tiny superheroes, a world in which evil is defeated by good.

This only happens if we remember and keep our eyes fixed and focused on Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, everywhere that we go. Let's pray together.

**SLIDE          Prayer**

*Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of this place and for the opportunity to worship—to remember and give thanks for the mighty acts of faith through Jesus Christ. God we thank you for his light which overcomes the darkness and for his life which tramples the grave. I pray thee would remind us of that great power today and fill up by your Holy Spirit. Give us strength to go and do likewise; to do no harm and avoid every kind of evil; to do all the good we can in all times and places; and to stay in love with you knowing that you first loved us. Keep your story of the good news before us, where we go, so that we would always remember and then shine that light into the world. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.*