

“Saved by a Superman”
Mark 5: 21-43
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The Rev. Dr. Don Dempsey
First Presbyterian Church
Lake Forest, IL

When I was a young boy one of my favorite TV shows was Superman starring George Reeves.

Each episode started with the coolest beginning, a beginning that my friends and I would often repeat to each other:

“Faster than a speeding bullet, more powerful than a locomotive, able to leap tall buildings at a single bound -- look, up in the sky, it's a bird, it's a plane, it's Superman.”

Superman’s father, Jor-El sent him to our planet Earth for a purpose.

“Even though you've been raised as a human being you're not one of them. They can be a great people; they wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all, their capacity for good, I have sent them you... my only son.”

On Earth, the son fights hard for truth and justice. He displays amazing abilities and incredible insights, but sometimes he feels that his power is being drained out of him.

After a dramatic battle with the forces of evil, he is killed. But then he is resurrected and ascends into heaven. He returns in a second coming.

This is the story of Jesus, right? Well, yes, it is.

But it is also the story of Superman.

This past Wednesday, Superman returned in the new movie titled, “Superman Returns“

After a long absence Superman returns from a search for his home planet, Krypton which he had found destroyed. He returns to earth and his “mother” Martha is driving the same old truck and she finds him in the same field where she originally found him.

In this version, you'll see his arms outstretched, as though he is being crucified, and watch as he receives a wound in the side - like the spear-stabbing endured by Jesus.

At one point in the movie, a bitter Lois Lane says, "The world doesn't need a savior, and neither do I."

But we do, Lois - we do!

"The Man of Steel is Back," according to a headline in The Daily Planet; that news alone is attracting people to local theaters, because as a nation we are crazy about our superheroes. Women want to be with them, and men want to be them. As comedian Jerry Seinfeld says, "Spider-Man, Superman, Batman . . . men don't see these as fantasies, they see them as career opportunities."

But the movie "Superman Returns" should also lure people into church, because this story can draw us deeper into the life of a true superhero named Jesus. He may not have super-strength and x-ray vision, but Jesus has the power to save us.

One of the writers of the Superman comic strip says that his superhero adheres to

"A Kryptonian-based belief system centered on monotheistic philosophy."

After arriving on Earth, Superman grows up in a Protestant family, probably Methodist, in the Midwest. Later, he visits a Catholic priest for confession, and returns for additional advice. He engages in frequent battles with his arch-enemy Lex Luthor."

Novelist John Byrne says that he has

"Always imagined Superman to have a fairly matter-of-fact attitude toward faith - he believes in God, but he does not make a big deal about it."

So Superman is a believer. But he's not going to force his faith on anyone.

But what about Jesus, who is not Superman, but the Son of Man?

Jesus comes on the scene in the gospel of Mark as a man of action: curing the sick, casting out demons, cleansing a leper, and healing a paralytic - all before he finishes calling his twelve disciples (2:13-19).

Then he stills a great windstorm on the water and heals another person possessed by demons, sending this man's numerous unclean spirits into a herd of 2000 swine, which immediately stampede down a steep bank into the sea, where they drown (4:35-5:13).

Wouldn't that be an incredible sight on the big screen, enhanced by digital surround-sound?

This superhero Jesus is *all about saving people* from illness, evil, destruction and death. In fact, the Greek word for "save" pops up again and again in this gospel, although it is usually reduced to bland English words such as "heal" or "get well."

Fortunately, the people around Jesus can see his power clearly, and they don't mince any words. Desperate for help, they're looking to be saved by no one less than a Superman.

First comes Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He falls at Jesus' feet and begs him repeatedly,

"My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well."

What he really says is, "Come . . . so that she may be saved" (5:21-23).

Being an authentic superhero, Jesus goes with him.

Then a woman, who has been suffering from terrible bleeding for twelve years, joins the crowd that is following Jesus. She and the others press in on him like a mob of adoring fans, and the woman says to herself,

"If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."

Again, what she really says is,

"If I touch, I will be saved" (vv. 24-28).

She is like a fan of the “Man of Steel,” dreaming of putting a single finger on the folds of his crimson cape.

So she does it. She touches him. And immediately she knows that she's been healed!

She can feel it!

The pain, suffering, social isolation and ritual impurity that she has endured for twelve long years is suddenly over. She has been saved!

Then the plot thickens. Like Superman in the vicinity of a piece of Kryptonite, Jesus suddenly begins to feel that his power has left him.

"Who touched my clothes?" he shouts to the mob pressed in around him.

Nobody answers.

"Who touched my clothes?" Jesus needs to know.

"Uh . . . like, everybody," say the disciples to themselves.

But Jesus is looking for a particular person, an utterly unique individual who has come for one reason - to be saved.

A few more moments pass. Then the woman steps forward. Full of fear and trembling, she tells her superhero the whole truth. But instead of punishing her for his momentary power-loss, he commends her by saying,

"Daughter, your faith has made you well."

Literally, your faith has saved you. "Go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (vv. 29-34)

Jesus stuns the woman, and all those around her, by stating that her faith has saved her.

Not his clothes.

Not her touch.

Not anything in or on his body at all.

Instead, Jesus says that *her faith* is the source of her healing –

She is saved by her conviction that Jesus is the decisive expression of the power and the presence of God.

Then the scene shifts, in a dramatic turn so common in summer blockbusters. While Jesus is still speaking, some people come to Jairus with the news that his daughter is dead. But Jesus overhears this message, and says to Jairus,

"Do not fear, only believe" (vv. 35-36).

He has just commended a woman for believing; now he turns around and commands a man to believe.

They proceed to Jairus's house, where there is a commotion being caused by people weeping and wailing. Jesus cuts through the chaos, throws the mourners out, and enters the house with only the father, the mother, and three of his disciples. Without lengthy prayers or dramatic gestures, Jesus reaches out to the child and says,

"Little girl, get up!" And immediately the girl gets up and begins to walk about (vv. 37-42).

She is saved-not Superman but by the Son of Man; Saved by the one who carries the power and presence of God into the very middle of human life; saved by Jesus, the Christ.

Lois Lane wasn't thinking right: The world does need a savior!

Jesus came for a reason, to "seek and to save those who are lost;"

To save us from iniquity and illness, sin and death.

He comes to us because

"God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The key is to believe in him; to rely on him; to trust him to be our savior.

- We do this when we devote a week of vacation to a mission trip along the Gulf coast, confident that we'll see the face of our savior in the people we serve.
- We do this when we give a tithe to God's work, trusting that our needs will be met if we are faithful in our commitments.
- We do this when we face an uncertain future with confidence, believing that our Lord is always working for good in our lives.
- We do this when we make an effort to be loving and forgiving; not because such actions are easy or gratifying, but because Christ has always been loving and forgiving toward us.

This is not necessarily a life of action and excitement. There isn't always a lot of drama associated with believing in Jesus. There is isn't any – "Look! Up in the air! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's"

No, faith is not a summer blockbuster with jaw-dropping special effects. There isn't going to be eye-popping action and earsplitting sound effects.

Faith is usually seen in the silent touch of a desperate woman, or the quiet hope of a father walking into a room filled with the smell of death.

"Do not fear," says Jesus. "Only believe."

If we do, we will be saved.