

7.28.13

Luke 10:25-37

More Than a Cape & a Mask

Pastor Keith Nelson

I want to take a moment and say “Thank you” to all of you, the members and friends of McCabe UMC for your generous and outstanding contribution to the Bakken Oil Rush Miracle Offering. You gave over \$9,000. Other than the Arthur Church with the \$50,000 challenge gift, at this point and time, McCabe UMC has led the way among the North Dakota Churches in giving to this project. Thank You so very much

Just to give you a quick update, our Watford City person, Jim Konsor has been in WC for 3 weeks. He’s building relationships, making connections, looking for housing, and looking for a location in which to do ministry. Rent is high, space is scarce, buildings are at a premium. But the need is significant and we have a great big God who is able to handle what we see as challenges and obstacles.

The biggest need we have as we look to our ministry presence in Watford City is that of a piece of land and a building to base ministry out of. What I’m doing, everywhere I go, is asking people to pray for this need. And then I’m also asking people to connect me with developers and investment people who might be willing to listen out our vision, catch the passion we have, and then decide they want to partner with us and help us acquire the land and build the building we need.

But thank you for your incredible gift, you are helping make this ministry happen. You are making a difference in people’s lives in Watford City and the Oil Rush region. Actually, that is exactly what I want to talk to you about today. The truth is we all want to make a difference in some way in this world as we make our way through this journey of life.

How I know we all want to make a difference in people’s lives is in part because of the popularity of Superheroes. You see superheroes are able to rise about the chaos and confusion of the world in which we live and they are able to have a positive impact in people’s lives. And secretly, that is what all of us, deep down, want to do too.

How many of you had a favorite superhero as a kid? How many of you still do? Two weeks ago Nancy I went to see the movie The Lone Ranger. He was one of the early superheroes – he was my dad’s favorite. He listened to the adventures of The Lone Ranger on the radio when he was young.

For me, my superhero was Zorro. That was a great show. A dark and mysterious man who wore a mask and had a cool cape. He was great with a sword and went around righting wrongs and fighting for the weak and vulnerable. He made the world a better place. What’s not for a boy to like, right??

I liked Zorro so much I even had my own Zorro outfit as a kid. I had a cowboy hat simply because I was a farm boy in South Dakota. My boots were some old waterproof slip on boots my dad had thrown away because they had holes in them. My cape was an old rug mom and gotten rid of because it was fraying and worn out. My mask was a pair of those dark plastic film eye ware you used to get at the eye doctor when they dilated your eyes. My sword was a stick I found in the wood pile. I was pretty cool, or so I thought.

I rode all over the farm on my pretend horse righting wrongs and saving the day in all sorts of situations. To this day if you go down in the basement of the farmhouse I grew up in chances are you’ll see the word Zorro

scrawled on the walls. I would practice making my Z in the basement. Of course I'd fill in the rest of the word just to let it be known, Zorro was around.

Yet, as much as I loved Zorro, and wanted to be Zorro. And even as good as I was at making the Z with the pencil, there came a point when I realized that being Zorro was more than just wearing a mask or a cape. It meant living a certain way – being a certain kind of person. It meant holding to and living according a certain set of values, and being open and available to becoming involved in someone's life. After all, that's what Zorro did in every show. He saw a need and he did something about it

That is the mark of a true superhero. They are about the business of righting wrongs, of helping the helpless, of being there at just the right time to make a difference in someone's life.

Well, in Jesus day they had their own version of superheroes. They generally didn't wear masks and capes, but these individuals who were looked up to and they did leave their own mark in a community. These superheroes were known as Rabbi's or teachers. One of which we know quite well. His name was Jesus.

Jesus as a Rabbi or a teacher had gained quite a reputation. There were many who did see him as a superhero of their day. After all, he seemed to be able to take on the government, as well as the Religious establishment. He spoke truth in ways that connected with people. Plus, he performed miracles from time to time. That all sounds much like a superhero, doesn't it?

In today's reading from the Bible we encounter this superhero, Jesus, doing his thing; he's teaching. Luke has just told the story of Jesus sending the 72 out into community to do the Kingdom work he has shared with them. Then the same 72 return telling of all the great things they had done. They must have felt like the Zorro's or the Lone Rangers of their day. Here they are, these seemingly ordinary men and women who did great, larger than life things to change the world. Jesus congratulates them on work well done

Then immediately Luke gives us this story that you heard read a moment ago. A story with a very powerful message about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. A story that tells what it means to be on Mission with Jesus. It's a story is about an expert in the law, not civil law but religious law. In other words, the laws of the Old Testament.

This expert is testing Jesus and he asks the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Now why is this expert testing Jesus? We don't know for sure. We do know that Jesus had angered the Jewish religious leadership and therefore they were trying to trap or trick him so they could arrest him. This could be another one of those attempts.

But this religious expert might also be someone who is a faith seeker, you might say. He might be someone who has been hiding behind the "mask" of religious law. Now obviously he's a person wanting to make a difference in the world. That's why he gave himself so faithfully to studying religious law. But maybe he's finding living by the law in unfulfilling.

I wonder if he realizes there's something different about Jesus and he's curious, wondering, what it really means to be a part of the movement, to be identified with this superhero, Jesus. So he checking things out and asks a question. "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus asks the man what the scriptures say. Jesus allows the man to speak out of his training / his expertise. The lawyer answers, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus tells the expert he has answered wisely and correctly. "Do this and you will live." Jesus says. But the lawyer isn't satisfied. He wants to go to a deeper level to gain a deeper understanding of this teaching. So, he asks another question, "Who is my neighbor?"

The man is saying, If I'm supposed to love my neighbor as myself, help me better understand who my neighbor is. Who is it that I have to love? he's asking. To answer this question Jesus tells a story

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. Along the way on an empty stretch of road the man was attacked, robbed and beaten. He was left along the side of the road to die.

A priest, the religious elite, came along the way shortly after this happened. He sees the beaten man, and thinks "Oh this is terrible – poor guy." But he crosses to the other side of the road and keeps on going.

Shortly after the priest, along comes a Levite, a trained lay person who also supposedly knows the ways of God. He too sees the man in great distress. "How unfortunate this is. I hope someone helps him." And then he too crosses to the other side of the road and goes on by.

Next along the road comes a Samaritan / a true outcast in the Jewish tradition. If there was a group of people that were always the butt of the off-color jokes, it was the Samaritans. They were truly seen as an unworthy race/group of people.

Along comes this Samaritan who sees the injured and hurting man. He stops and gets ointment and bandages from his pack. He binds up the wound, puts the stranger on his donkey and takes him to an inn, gets a room, cares for the man. The next day before he leaves, he gives extra money asking the inn keeper to continue caring for the man's needs. If there's any further expense, he'll cover it, he says.

Then Jesus asks the question of the religious expert, "Which of the three became the neighbor... Or acted neighborly?"

"The one who showed mercy." the lawyer answers.

Jesus said, "You have answered well, again. Go and do likewise. Or for a second time Jesus said, "Do this, and you will live." And with that...the story ends.

Now you might wonder, what did the lawyer do next? We don't know. Did this conversation change his life? Did he become a follower? Hard to say...

Jesus, don't do this to us! Give us a little closure with this story. Help us apply it to our lives today. What are we supposed to gain from it right now?

Actually, that is a great question to ask. I believe through this story Jesus tells he gives us several principles to apply to our lives right now. The first principle I believe Jesus wants us to hear is this;

- 1. Faith is more than just a Noun, a label, or a set of rules.**

You see, this person is identified as a lawyer, a religious expert. That's a label – a title. He was an expert with the law...the religious rules of his day. If rules were the answer to getting the Kingdom Work done that Jesus wanted done – this guy would have excelled. He had the rules down pat

But Jesus in this story is clearly saying, having a title isn't enough. Knowing the rules won't get it done. It's going to take something more. And that's where the second principle comes in.

You see, the second point I believe Jesus makes for us to hear today is this

2. Faith is really a verb - If you want to make a difference – If you want to be a superhero...Be a neighbor! Live your faith.

Faith and God's Kingdom is lived out in the day to day stuff we experience. Our time in this beautiful sanctuary and great facility is really no more important than what we do out there in the world the rest of the week.

Jesus is saying...if you want to get it right concerning the Kingdom Values. If you want to know how to live your life in order to make a difference, the answer is simple, be a neighbor.

Now this has nothing to do with an address of where you live or who you live next too. But it has everything to do with how open you are to seeing the people around you, seeing the needs present, and then being willing to get involved. That's what superheroes do – they see the need. They decide they can do something about it. And they take action...they get involved.

That my friends is what it means to be on mission with Jesus. It's not about leaping tall buildings or even having a mask or a cape. It's about seeing a need, realizing you can do something about it, and then being willing to be a neighbor.

Now, since you are here this morning in this place of worship, I'm assuming that you want to be on Mission with Jesus. You want to be a part of the Kingdom work that Jesus has empowered the church to do right here.

And because I know you want to be a part God's Kingdom Work here and now, if I could, I'd give you all a T-shirt with a big NW or NM on the front. What does that stand for you ask?? Why....that's your superhero sign. You are Neighbor Woman or Neighbor Man. For you younger one's it would be a NB or NG; Neighbor Boy or Neighbor Girl. But know you are a part of the Superhero team too.

So, to end this message I want you all to raise you right hand and Repeat after me....

"I am..... Neighbor MAN (or woman).

I will see..... the people around me

And I will treat them..... as my neighbor

So help me God!!!

Don't you feel different already? You've been sworn in as one of God's superheroes. It's incredible the power you now have to touch lives and change the world one person at a time.

You know, it's going to be amazing to hear all the superhero stories coming out of Bismarck in the coming weeks and months. I know this to be true because today we are unleashing in this community a whole bunch of superheroes who are going to do their best to change the world...one life at a time.

You want to make a difference in the world?? Do it Jesus' way.... Forget the Mask & the Cape. Go be a neighbor - Go out to serve. AMEN