

Sunday, 20 March 2016

[We want a hero- Palm Sunday](#)



Palm Sunday

[Luke 19:28-40; Luke 22:14-23:56](#)

I have to admit that I love superheroes. When I was a kid I collected comics. I watched superhero TV shows and movies. I played superhero videogames. I had superhero toys. ... You may have noticed that superheroes seem to be everywhere now. Every few months a new superhero movie comes out and the toy stores are always in sync with the latest movie.

When I was a kid I loved superman. I used to pretend I was Clark Kent. I had a pair of sunglasses with the lenses popped out

that I would wear around town when my mom had to run errands. I had a little briefcase I carried around that had a towel I could tie into a cape, and a pair of underwear I could pull on over my pants for when I had to transform into superman.

Superman looks human. He looks so human he can be overlooked and ignored as Clark. But he is more than human. He can lift trains over his head. He can shoot lasers out of his eyes. He can freeze with his breath. He's bulletproof. And, he can fly. He is a powerful force for the cause of good in a world filled with evil focused on destruction and chaos.

Every generation has stories about superhuman heroes. We long for someone we can believe in. We long for someone who has the power to stop the forces of evil all around us. Superheroes aren't ordinary people because we know that it takes someone more. We want someone who can fly, read minds, shoot electricity from their fingertips, and see into the future. We want someone who can't be stopped by a bullet or a tank. We want someone who has indestructible integrity, and whose loyalty can't be bought. We want someone indestructible- morally and physically. We want someone with power to stop evil and protect the innocent. We want superman to fly in and vaporize the Tsunami before it hits the villages. We want him to walk into the headquarters of ISIS as bullet bounce off him and fly off with their leader. We live in a very broken world. We want a superhero because we know that the evils in the world are stronger than we are.

The people of first century Israel wanted a superhero. They wanted someone who would act through brute force to destroy

the super villains of the day- Caesar and his cronies, the Roman soldiers. They wanted their superhero to take over and set up an ideal earthly kingdom. All the bullies would be kicked out of Israel. All corruption would be destroyed- peace and justice would fill the land. By the first century they had been expecting him for centuries. Their own prophets foretold that he would arrive, and the people were living in a constant and desperate state of expectation.

Their word for this superhero was "messiah". He is empowered by God's strength. He is unstoppable, and he is good. In our Gospel reading (Luke 19:28-40) Jesus arrives in Jerusalem and is welcomed as this long expected superhero. Jesus makes a bold statement that he is, in fact, this expected hero by purposefully fulfilling the prophecy that the expected hero would come riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9).

The people welcome him as their king, waving palm branches and placing them on the road along with their cloaks as a kind of red carpet welcome to their long expected king. The people are shouting, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!".

Jesus heads straight into the temple and symbolically brings judgement on it for its corruption- Driving out those who used the temple for their own financial gain. The hero has arrived to set things right. And the people are sure that things are about to change. ... But, the leadership of Jerusalem has different plans for Jesus. They are not about to hail him as king and give up their positions, or disturb the delicate balance they have achieved between them and Rome.

The people were longing for a messiah, but their vision of the Messiah was too much like a superhero. Their vision was too human. When the Messiah arrived they had a to-do list waiting for him. But, Jesus does not come to do the will of human beings. He comes to do the will of God the Father. Jesus does not come to work through the human checklist and kill all the bad guys. His vision is bigger than that.

The will of the Father is to deal with the greater enemies. Jesus is to deal with the enemies and powers that give rise to the Caesars, the Hitlers, the tyrants, and bullies of the world. The will of the Father is not to deal just with the symptoms but to get at the root cause of the disease. Which meant taking on all the hate and violence of the people. Quickly the shouts of praise turned to shouts of "crucify him". Instead of being placed on a throne as their king, he was raised up on a cross. As he took on this hate and violence he got closer and closer to the root of the real enemy. Until he came face to face with the ultimate cause of all the suffering in this world- Sin. Destroying Sin's power, he is raised from the dead and pushes through death to come out the other side a new kind of human being.

Jesus is more than expected. His destiny was not to be just a ruler like King David. He is Immanuel- God with us. Our messiah came to defeat the ultimate enemies of Sin and Death, not just human rulers. Jesus' sacrifice for our sake can have such an effect because in Jesus we see God's words and actions. The cross is God's work for us.

Our love of superheroes exposes our deeper desire for a

messiah, but Jesus is obedient to the will of his Father, not our desires. Unlike Superman who fixes all the things we think needs to be fixed, in the way we think they should be fixed- usually through brute force- Jesus comes to fix what God knows needs to be fixed, in the way God wants it to be fixed. Superman does the will of men, but Jesus comes to do the will of God. He came not to be an earthly king, but a heavenly king.

The expected messiah was of the line of King David and was to fulfill God's promise of an unending heir to David's throne (2 Sam 7:12-16). But, Jesus is not to take up the royal line and rule in the way David did. While he may be the Son of David, he is also the Son of God, and His kingdom will have no end. The destiny of this hero was not to bring unity and sovereignty to a nation, but to bring salvation to the world. He frees the world from the satanic chains of enslavement. He brings the good news to those who are underprivileged and marginalized that they are not forgotten by God. He releases people captive to sin and corrects the brokenness that is not part of God's original creation. He calls people to reconsider the path they are walking. He calls them to turn away from the path that leads to slavery and destruction and turn instead to walk the path that leads to God, which is directly through the cross to Jesus' glorious resurrection. ... This is a different kind of king. Jesus came not to fit into our understanding of the world, but to free our understanding to see the world more as God sees it. He came to fulfill the promises God made to humanity.

We want a superhero. We want a messiah to come and set our world straight. We have a messiah, but sometimes we forget that he doesn't fix things according to our will. He fixes things

according to God's will. He does not use his power to fight violence with more violence. Instead, as Paul tells us in Philippians, "he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil 2:7-8). Our hero has arrived and he is working to set things right, but he is not obedient to our expectations or our will. He is obedient to God's expectations and God's will. God was willing to gently ride a donkey and ask for our acceptance, not command it. Jesus teaches us the depth of God's love for us even by allowing us to kill him on a cross. He was so gentle that he even allowed us to reject him, and crucify him. And even after all that, He will not give up on us. He used even our rejection of him, his own crucifixion, to show the unbelievable depth of his love for us. And that is a hero who is worth believing in.