

2-03-08 A Different Kind of Hero – Matthew 17:1-19 - Pastor Draeger 10AM

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus, Amen.

This morning I'd like to talk to you about heroes, maybe even a different kind of hero. And as we do I'd like to ask the question, who are some heroes? Who are some of your heroes? Hillary Clinton, your mother, your husband for putting up with you, Tom Brady (some people are voting for him for MVP of the Super Bowl game this afternoon and he hasn't even played yet). Heroes. – "Jesus."

Oh I guess this is church, John, you know the old story in Sunday School about the squirrel. Sunday School teacher is describing the squirrel -- you know, little furry critter, curly tail, goes after nuts, lives in trees and the ground and asked the class what is this critter? And the kid says, "Well obviously it sounds like a squirrel, but this is Sunday School so the answer must be Jesus.

There's a TV show called Heroes; a Sci-Fi kind of thing, popular on NBC. Now that's a different kind of hero isn't it, if you've watched it or read anything about it. Heroes - people describe heroes in many different ways. In fact Rudy Giuliani this week, as he was endorsing John McCain, called John McCain and American hero. This week the Palo Alto Daily announced that there is an event that's going to celebrate unsung heroes. In fact, the Mid-Peninsula Community Media Center of Palo Alto will air its 2nd 'Faces of Local Heroes,' naming people who are just every day kind of people, who have done some things that have made a difference. And one of the people named is a man from Redwood City who has put together a foundation to enable immigrant students to attend college; and he's being honored for that, considered to be a hero. Or perhaps you read about the girl who woke up and their house was on fire and 14 people in East Palo Alto were rescued because she had smelled the smoke, felt the heat and saved the 14 people in her family; and she is touted as a hero.

Heroes are oftentimes people that we consider who have done grand and glorious things. They've done big things; they are the MVP, if you will. The most valuable person or player if you're in a ball game.

And I'd like to talk to you about a different kind of hero that may not look like a hero the way you normally would think of heroes. In fact, I'd like to do that in the back drop of this story that's told in the Bible several times. Matthew, Mark and Luke tell the story of the transfiguration of our Lord, so clearly this is something the Holy Spirit felt was important for us to hear from 3 different vantage points. And then even Peter makes reference to it in the 2nd reading for today.

It happens that Jesus takes His disciples up on a mountain with Him and this is after some rather interesting things have occurred in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus has been with His disciples, He's asked them this very profound question, "Who do people think that I am?" And the answer is included, "Elijah," because many thought that Elijah would come to proceed the Messiah; he would be forerunner. Indeed Malachi makes that statement in the last book of the Old Testament in the Hebrew Scriptures.

And so you have this account of people coming to Jesus now, thinking He is Messiah or Elijah at least. Jesus asked, who do you say that I am?" Peter answers, "Well you are

the Christ.” Peter is firm about that. Right after that Jesus begins to teach His disciples that He is about to suffer and die at the hands of the Scribes and the Pharisees and chief priests. And Peter says, “No, Lord, this shall never happen to You.” And Jesus says to him, “Get thee behind Me Satan.” And then He goes on to say in the words immediately preceding this text, He talks about if a man is going to follow Him, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me. Rather bizarre words.

And then we have this account, and I’m thinking these things are all there for a reason; they’re all hooked up together. And Jesus will clarify what He’s all about, even though Peter doesn’t get it. Mark’s account says that Peter sees what’s happening and doesn’t even know what he’s saying. Mark records that probably because Mark and Peter were colleagues and he got that from Peter’s own mouth, saying “I didn’t really realize what I was saying at that moment.” He was probably reflecting upon that incident as he told the story to Mark, as Mark then would record it.

Well, let me set the stage for you with all of that as backdrop. Jesus takes these 3 guys aside as He had apparently done many times. Takes them up on the mountain, and while they’re there, they’re chatting, and Jesus has changed right in front of them. His face shines, His clothes become so white; it says that a fuller could not get them brighter. A fuller is a person who runs Broadway Cleaners, someone who has the capacity to clean things and make them *really* clean.

And then all of a sudden while this is happening, who shows up? Moses and Elijah. You have to understand, people, these were the heroes of the Jews. Moses was the great law giver. He was the one who led the people out of slavery in Egypt. He’s the one who was there when the Red Sea was parted. He was the one who went through the dry ground with them and led them into the place of the Sinai region. He was the one who came down with his face shining, having encountered God at the Ten Commandments and brought the 2 tablets of stone down. He’s the one who hoisted the pole with a bronze serpent on it in the wilderness, and when people looked at it they would instead of looking at their feet where all the serpents were biting. They would look at this bronze serpent on the pole, and they would be saved. He was the one who was there to explain manna and the need to pick it up daily. He was the one who lead them for 40 years of wonder. He was their hero.

And then there’s Elijah who was considered to be a great prophet. And he was a hero because he was the one who came to the widow at Zarephath and asked her to make him a dinner and she said, “All I have is enough for one meal for my son and myself.” And Elijah said, “Go ahead and make it anyway.” And he stayed there for some time and the food never ran out. Elijah was doing miracles. And then her son dies, and Elijah raises her son from the dead. I mean he’s a hero, isn’t he? In anybody’s book, he’s a hero. So no wonder Peter gets excited when he sees the change of Jesus in front of him. He sees Moses and he sees Elijah, the three of them talking. You can understand why he might say, “Man these are heroes. This is a great place to be. Lord if You will, I’ll build 3 temples. I’ll do this, not we, I’ll do it! I’ll do it, 3 booths, one for Moses, one for Elijah and of course, Jesus, one for You.” And that’s when Mark records because he didn’t know what to say, he was so touched by the moment.

Meanwhile what happens? A cloud overshadows them. What else happens? A voice booms out of heaven, “This is My Beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. Listen to

Him.” In other words, Peter, there’s one person that matters. There is a king, there is a hero of a different kind, and I want you to attend to Him. Jesus later would say that Moses and the prophets pointed to Him as He talks to the disciples on the way to the Emmaus. He’s a hero of a different kind. And of the different kind is made clear in the last words of the text. For at the end of this account it says that Jesus told the disciples to tell no one of this vision until after the resurrection. After the resurrection.

Do you remember that after the feeding of the 5000 John records, that the people wanted to make Him king because He had fed the 5000 miraculously? What a deal that would be. I mean you don’t have to worry anymore about feeding the hungry at the Seneca Hotel or over at the Maple Street Shelter because we’ve got Jesus and He’s going to make everybody well satisfied. This becomes a king of glory, if you will. But Jesus wouldn’t be that kind of king. He withdrew from the people; He went away from them to a quiet place because that wasn’t His model of being hero. His model of being a hero was the shape of a cross. His glory wasn’t in that He was the one who could perform miracles and do great things and heal the sick and raise the dead. His notion was that His life was to be centered around a cross. And in dying for people, give them a hope that would come to the forgiveness of sins that would carry them through everything into eternity. Because for Jesus, the problem wasn’t illness and hunger alone yes He’s concerned about those things but He had a deeper concern that the brokenness of sin that creates all those problems needed to be addressed. He wanted to get to the root of the problem and that would require not a glorified king, but a servant king, a suffering servant king who would do the most heroic thing; that He would die for people like you and me and the 7 billion people on the planet today, and all those who have lived, and all those who will yet live. He would sacrifice Himself for us. He was a different kind of hero. He would give us a life that would matter forever. He would give us a hope that cannot be dismantled. He would feed us with things that will keep us going into eternity. He’s a different kind of hero.

He probably would in some ways look more like the Sci-Fi heroes because He would do things very differently than you might expect. Our hero is not a hero of glory but a hero of a cross. He would sacrifice Himself and He would call us to live similarly. For indeed He would set this up as I have indicated, when He would say, “Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it. But whoever loses their life for Me will find it. And what good will it be for you to gain the whole world and yet forfeit your soul? What can you give in exchange for your soul? For the son of man is going to come in his Father’s glory with His angels, and then He will reward everyone according to what they have done.” He’s talking about a glory that will be revealed, but it will be revealed at a cross and an open tomb. That’s a different kind of hero.

I would hope that for you and me our lives might know what is really heroic and know the One who is really heroic. That we might let Him come into our lives in new and fresh ways. He’s come into our lives in the waters of baptism; He comes into our lives in the words of Holy Scripture. And He comes into our life not in a glorified way, but in the humble, simple forms of bread and wine today because He’s not that kind of hero. He’s the hero of subtlety and of stillness, because remember it was Elijah who discovered that God wasn’t in the wind or the firestorm, that He was in the still, small voice. And He comes in that stillness to us today, no less the hero, but the hero of the greatest magnitude, who would live and die and rise and give us the benefits of that living. And

dying and rising again today, so that we might go out into the world and be different because He's our hero and has called us to live our life in Him.

It is my hope that somehow we might realize that we're here to serve because our hero has and continues to serve us. We're here to be humble servants because our hero never attracted attention to Himself. We can't help but follow Him and honor Him because He alone is worthy because He died and rose and lives; and is here with us today. Let's celebrate this hero and call Him more than MVP. Amen.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, our hero, keep and guard our hearts and minds as we live in Him, now and into eternity. Amen.