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Scriptures: Psalm 34:11-14, Romans 6:1-8

Batman and Robin decide to go camping in the desert one night. They find a suitable spot, pitch their tent and soon fall asleep. In the middle of the night, Batman wakes his faithful friend saying, "Robin, look up at the sky and tell me what you see." Robin replies, "Why Batman, I see millions of stars." Batman then asks him, "And what does that tell you?" Robin is silent while he thinks about this and then he says, "Astronomically speaking, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, it tells me that Saturn is in Leo. Chronologically, it appears to be approximately a quarter past three. Meteorologically, it looks as though we're in for a beautiful day tomorrow. And theologically, it's evidence that the Lord is all-powerful and that we are small and insignificant. What does it tell you Batman?" Batman is also silent for a moment, then says... "Robin, someone has stolen our tent!"

This past week at Vacation Bible School we have been learning all about superheroes. If you had a chance to look at the Fellowship Hall this past week you would have seen the walls lined with superheroes. The superhero phenomenon has taken off in the last decade as favorite comic book heroes hit the big screen. Almost every year now, we can expect at least one new superhero movie. And now both Marvel and DC Comics are creating instant blockbusters as they bring several superheroes together in one film. Each year at Halloween kids dress up as their favorite superhero. Children act out their favorite superhero storyline on the playgrounds or with action figures. Pastor Tim has now been in two weddings where the groomsmen all wear superhero shirts under their fancy suits so that they can take a staged picture of the groomsmen flashing their superhero emblems. Superheroes are a big deal!

This past week we not only talked about classic comic book superheroes, we also talked about how **all** of us can be God's superheroes. We studied King David, Abigail, young Jesus in the temple, the Beatitudes, and Pentecost. Each of these scriptures showed us how God calls the unlikely person to be a superhero! The one we don't expect has the power to save the day. We may think of superheroes as the physically strong and mighty, but we learned that God's strength and God's might look a little different. God's heroes have five different qualities. And as we learned them this past week, we learned a motion to go with each one. These were a part of the pledge the kids did for you. Let's give them a try together. God's heroes have **heart**. God's heroes have **courage**. God's heroes have **wisdom**. God's heroes have **hope**. God's heroes have **power**! Good job! God's heroes can be each of us, if we live like the heroes we see in scripture.

When I think of the classic superhero story, I think of someone who has been given some type of special talent or ability. Usually when the hero receives that ability or first discovers a special power they struggle with how best to use it. They may even discover that this special ability is not in and of itself pure, but they can choose to use their power to do good or evil. This inner struggle is what led the Spiderman series to popularize a phrase that is originally attributed to the French philosopher, Voltaire: "with great power comes great responsibility."

That saying sums up this morning's scripture from Romans 6. The section we read is part of a larger sermon from Paul, where he addresses the theological relationship between sin and God's grace. Paul was concerned that some would argue that once they were baptized, they had received God's grace so it didn't matter if they continued to sin. In fact, they may even argue that if they sinned all the more, then it would give opportunity for people to see just how gracious God could be. If our sin increases, then aren't we just giving God's grace a chance to

abound? Paul answers, “by no means,” with an emphasis like “absolutely not!” Yes, God’s grace abounds for all sinners, but that does not give us justification to continue to sin. We have been given a great gift that must be responded to wisely. With great power comes great responsibility.

When we receive God’s gift of grace, Paul says we are to walk in newness of life. For in our baptism, we died like Christ -- not a physical death, but a death to sin. Death to a former way of living. If we have been baptized into Christ, then when go into the waters, we die a death like his, a death that defeats sin. In the same way, when we rise out of the baptismal waters, we are resurrected into a life like his. There can be no return to who we were before our baptism because that part of us has died. Grace abounds, yes, but sin cannot because sin has been destroyed. Through Christ, we are no longer enslaved to sin.

The theme scripture for the week of Vacation Bible School was Psalm 34, the other scripture we read this morning. The version the kids memorized as their superhero code was “Do good, seek peace, and go after it.” And, of course, there are motions that go with that too, so let’s give that a try... (**do the motions**). What I like about this version we’ve been memorizing all week is that it has a strong call to action. This superhero code does not allow for a passive walk of faith, but one where right living and right attitude are pursued, even chased after! This is the kind of Superhero that God is looking for. The world needs more superheroes like this: superheroes that are known because of their heart more so than any outward appearance; superheroes that are known for courageous faith in the face of struggles; superheroes who are wise and prudent; superheroes who live into hope instead of fear; and superheroes who have the power of the Holy Spirit. Superheroes who live like Christ and who walk in newness of life.

As I was preparing for VBS this past week, I found a picture online of Jesus sitting in a chair, surrounded by superheroes like the Hulk, Captain American and Spiderman. These superheroes were his captive audience as he finished a story telling them, “and that’s how I saved the world!” The one thing that God’s superheroes remember is that we cannot save ourselves. We have great power and we can do great things through Jesus Christ who gives us strength. We can live transformed lives through God’s grace. But it is only through God and for God that these great things occur. So even though we are God’s heroes, we continue to look to the sky to the one who does have the power to save. We continue to look to and for God’s greatest superhero, Jesus Christ our Lord.

There’s a cute story about a little girl named Kellie, who met with the priest and the other children to learn how to receive First Communion. Kellie watched intently as the priest demonstrated how the children were to cup their hands to receive the host. To practice, the priest gave them a little piece of bread, saying the typical Communion blessing, “God be with you.” This made a great impression on Kellie. When she came home and was eating lunch she told her mother to cup her hands. Kellie took a piece of bread from her sandwich and placed it in her mother’s hands. In her most angelic voice, she whispered, “God will get you.”¹

We can praise God that through Jesus Christ and his body and blood given for us, God will get us. God’s grace abounds and is freely given. But with great power comes great responsibility. We must live lives that have been transformed by our Lord. We must die to sin. We must have heart, have courage, have wisdom, have hope, and have power. May we walk in newness of life as God’s superheroes. Amen.

¹ homileticonline.com