

Fall Series: “Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith”

Series Text: Jesus says, “Much will be demanded from everyone who has been given much, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked.” -Luke 12:48

Sermon #6: “Wonder Woman - The Strength of Love”

Scripture: 1 John 3:11-21

Sermon Text: “Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love.” -1 Corinthians 13:13

Source: David Werner

Theme: Wonder Woman offers an alternative to handling issues with aggressive strength and violence. Her character offers a different way to resolve problems: the strength and power of love, mercy, Forged in the WWII era, Wonder Woman becomes the archetype of the modern, liberated woman, and a welcomed alternative to violence.

Blurb: Strength, power, and influence don’t have to be defined in terms of brawn, aggression and violence. In a world where we personally experience “might makes right” almost on a daily basis, we need a different approach. Our God calls us to be strong and mighty, but not in the ways the world operates. Wonder Woman, our superhero this week, offers an alternative, a way for us to see how we can live heroically in the strength and power of love, truth and justice.

Hymn Sing

Welcome - Pastor David

Worship Songs - Sanctify

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Kid’s Invited to Kid’s Church - Pastor David

Offering

Video: “Wonder Woman Powers Tribute”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5V1CYpdpjc>

3:03 minutes

PP#1: *Image of Lynda Carter as Wonder Woman, and Linda Carter today*

That was Wonder Woman, played in the famous TV series from 1974-1979 by the beautiful—and still gorgeous!—Lynda Carter. Can you image that that was over 40 years ago? Well, that TV show brought Wonder Woman off the comic book page and into our everyday lives.

Let’s test this. Last week our sermon series was on Daredevil. By show of hands, who knew about Daredevil the superhero before last week? OK, now, also by show of hands, who knew about Wonder Woman? See! Nearly everyone! Wonder Woman is an icon in our culture.

PP#2: Christians are called to live heroic lives!

1. We are sent to help make the world better
2. We are given the special power of the Holy Spirit
3. We are called to live for truth, justice, and the way of Jesus

That's why today I have to betray my own sermon series. In this series, we're taking a look at Marvel superheroes, and putting them in dialogue with the Bible, to see how we can learn lessons in how we can live heroic lives. You see, we are God's superheroes. We're called to live heroic lives in our world, helping to bring about justice, peace, freedom and new life. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit as our superpower, making us able to live the super way of Jesus.

PP#3: *Split screen image of Marvel & DC superheroes - Google images "Marvel vs DC"*

Well, in comics, there are two different universes of superheroes, each with their own list of heroes. It's kind of like Coke & Pepsi, or Ford and General Motors. I've been basing my sermon series on the Marvel universe, with Spiderman, Hulk, Iron Man and such. But I've had a number of people ask about superheros from the other universe, D.C., or Detective Comics. D.C. is much older, and really started the whole superhero thing during WWII. Marvel didn't get going until 20 years later. Who here are D.C. fans - show of hands? And D.C. even started the recent superhero movie craze, too, back with the Superman movies, and the constantly reinvented Batman movies.

PP#4: *Image of the Superfriends or Justice League heroes with Wonder Woman.*

So, I have to give a nod to the D.C. universe, and who better than with the greatest female superhero of all time? Like we saw, everyone knows about Wonder Woman. I hate to admit it, but Marvel just has no female superhero of that caliber, who ever rose to such prominence. Marvel is a male-dominated superhero world, and honestly, it needs some gender balancing. So, today, we're turning to D.C., and we find that even the very character of Wonder Woman was purposefully created to promote feminism and female equality.

PP#5: "Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith"

"Wonder Woman - The Strength of Love"

"Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love." -1 Corinthians 13:13

"Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith." "Wonder Woman - The Strength of Love." 1 Corinthians 13:13 "Now faith, hope, and love remain—these three things—and the greatest of these is love."

PP#6: *Image of the front cover of Sensation Comics #1, January 1942.*

Wonder Woman first appeared during WWII. Her origin comes when an American intelligence officer's plan crashed onto the mysterious, uncharted island of the Amazons, a race of giant women in Greek mythology. Princess Diana decides to take the American back and stay to help them in their fight against the evil of the Nazis. Her mother, the queen, gives her enchanted gifts to use as her outfit. Take a look from this clip of the first episode of the TV series.

Video: “Wonder Woman Spins! - Second Season” 9:59 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RzfLXzebs4>

Note: Only play 1:11 minutes of it, until after she spins three times

PP#7: *Images of Wonder Woman through the years.*

Princess Diana disguises herself as a common mortal, with the name Diana Prince, serving in the navy. But when she needs to become Wonder Woman, she spins around, and snap! she magically appears in her enchanted outfit.

So, if you remember from the opening video, what are some of Wonder Woman’s super powers? Name them out. [Strength, speed, jumping, agility, quickness, skill] How about the enchanted parts of her costume? [Indestructible bracelets that deflect anything shot at her, belt that gives her strength, tiara that acts like a boomerang, and most famous of all, the magic lasso, which is indestructible, she can control telepathically, and makes whomever is tied up inside tell the truth.] In the cartoon series, does anyone remember her special vehicle? What is it? [An invisible jet!]

I have to show you a clip from the pilot episode for the Wonder Woman TV series. I had never seen this before. The episode is set in 1940s America, when Wonder Woman first arrives. It’s a hilarious scene, ending with Wonder Woman making a crack against the male-dominated world:

Video: “Wonder Woman Pilot Episode 1975 (Bank Robbers)” 1:50 minutes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvrzZ29iGNk>

PP#8: *Image from halfway down* http://planetamarveldc.blogspot.com/2013_03_01_archive.html

Did you hear how Wonder Woman was trying to talk to the robbers to get them to put down their weapons? It was rude, and people could get hurt. And notice how she takes a dominantly *defensive* stance.

Up until that point, being a superhero was man’s work. Superman, Batman and the Flash used super strength and fighting skills to overpower villains. Wonder Woman brought a different approach for how to resolve conflict.

PP#9: *Image of William Moulton Marston & his early polygraph*

DC Comics hired American psychologist William Moulton Marston to create a different kind of superhero. Marston was famous for inventing the polygraph, the lie detector machine. If you ask me, that’s where the magic lasso of truth comes from! Well, Moulton was talking over his ideas to his wife. He said he wanted to create a superhero “who would triumph not with fists or firepower, but with love.” “‘Fine,’ said Elizabeth. ‘But make her a woman.’” He did. Through his scientific research, he had come to believe that women were more honest, efficient and reliable than men. When he launched the idea, he commented, “Wonder Woman is psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world.” What a shocking concept for the 1940s! “Women’s strong qualities have become despised because of their [physical] weakness. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman.” So, Wonder Woman goes to help fight the crime and evil so prevalent in a man’s world, offering an alternative approach to violence.

PP#10: Wonder Woman - The Strength of Love

1. Solving problems without brute force

1 John 3:18 “Little children, let us not love only in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

And here, I think, is the first takeaway for how we can live heroically. So much of the superhero world uses fighting to solve problems. It makes an exciting story, I suppose, but it really only *ends* the conflict rather than *resolving* it. God is in the business of transformation. He works to change people and situations for better. Clobbering and smashing may appeal to our aggression, but it does not bring healing and wholeness. We need an alternative!

Often times we think about Jesus’ teaching to turn the other cheek and to love our enemies as being very passive, and letting people walk all over us. Wonder Woman is a very strong figure, who stands up for her rights, and actively fights against evil and injustice, but doing it very differently than simply clobbering the bad guys. And that helps us. I mean, our problems are not so simplistic. Our “bad guys” are often the people we love dearly, but who are causing us grief! How do we resolve conflict within our families, or at work, or even within ourselves?

We have the super power of love. It is the strongest force on earth. 1 John 3:18 says to not merely give lip service to love, but to put it in action. Living out truth and love means not backing down from what is right, not giving in, but it also means not resorting to aggression or to simply label the other person as the problem and write them off. Strong love goes back again and again to engage those persons, always giving them the respect they deserve because they are God’s children. Resolving conflict by violence is so much easier, and faster! Resolving in love is so much more complicated, and time consuming, and requires us to abide in right behavior. But only it can bring transformation!

PP#11: 1 John 3:11, 13-21

This is the message that you heard from the beginning: love each other. ...

1 John 3:11, “This is the message that you heard from the beginning: love each other.”

What does your love look like? Now, I hope that if I asked your family or good friends, they would give good reports. But how about those you struggle to get along with? How about those you find annoying? How about the server who forgets to hold the onions, or the person who drives 10 miles an hour down the street, or the person who allows their dog to poop on your yard? How would they describe your love? True love has action. It doesn’t mean to hold your tongue but stew on the inside. It means engaging that dog-walker in a respectful way to bring change. And remember, love is long-suffering, even as long-suffering as it takes for Jesus to love us!

PP#12: Wonder Woman - The Strength of Love

1. Solving problems without brute force

2. Leaving behind what you love so you can bless others

“Jesus made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” -Philippians 2:7

You know, the more I thought about this, the more I was drawn to Wonder Woman’s origin. I mean, think about it. She meets a stranger, hears of the struggles of his home, and she decides to leave her home to go and help. Batman always lived in Gotham. Superman was sent away from his

home in order to save him. Wonder Woman chooses to leave hers, to save them! She gives up her life...that's really a heroic move! Would you do that?

Jesus did! He left His perfect world, and entered into our mess, in order to save us. He came into a world that not only wasn't His, but that turned on Him, rejected Him, and even killed Him! What! It's like Wonder Woman being hated, lynched, and killed! Why would she come? Why would Jesus? But He did. He came to bring life to those who killed Him. He came to bring healing to those who hated Him. He came so that you could come to Him!

So often we think of our lives as getting from God the blessings we enjoy. "Dear Lord, please bless me!" But that's not how God does things. Yes, He gives good things to His children. But God also puts Himself, His son, *and His people* in the giving role. When is the last time you prayed to God to give something? "Dear God, I give you my day. Do with it what you want." "Dear God, I give you my time. I'm willing to go and do whatever you ask." "Dear God, I give you my money. Just tell me where I should send it." "Dear God, I give you my attitude. Help me to give it to others in joy and peace and forgiveness." "Dear God, send me into this world to help it. I give up my own plans for my life, and I willingly choose to have you send me into this hurting world, filled with hate and strife and violence."

Christians are like Wonder Woman! We willingly give up our own lives and what we think is best, even what we love!, in order to serve. Wonder Woman reminds us to live heroically; that as Jesus-followers, we are missionaries in our own worlds!

What do we cling to too tightly? What do we try to hold on to too much? How are we clinging to what is safe and familiar and in our control, clinging to so that we are unable to grab a hold of what God is trying to give to us instead? Living heroically as Christians means that to some extent, we have to let go, in order to live fully in the plan God has for us.

PP#13: 1 John 3:11, 13-21

13 Don't be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have transferred from death to life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The person who does not love remains in death. 15 Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. 16 This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 17 But if a person has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need and that person doesn't care—how can the love of God remain in him?

1 John 3: "This is the message that you heard from the beginning: love each other. ... Don't be surprised, brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. We know that we have transferred from death to life, because we love the brothers and sisters. The person who does not love remains in death. Everyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. But if a person has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need and that person doesn't care—how can the love of God remain in him?"

PP#14: Wonder Woman - The Strength of Love

1. Solving problems without brute force
2. Leaving behind what you love so you can bless others
3. We are grounded in God's love for us

1 John 4:19 "We love because he first loved us."

Last lesson for living heroically for Jesus: no matter how long Wonder Woman is with mortals, and no matter what predicament she is in, she never forgets her true identity as an Amazonian princess. She always lives from that identity.

We are called to live in this world, but our true identity is in God's family. Yes, things can get rough for us, but we belong to the world God is creating! When we lose our way, and we start slipping into living selfishly, or by the values of the world, God's Holy Spirit within us, that super power we have inside, reassures us of our true identity. Even if the world rejects us, even when we condemn ourselves, we can take confidence in our relationship with God. This is how we can be sustained in our heroic living. We don't love because this world, or the people around us, are loveable. We love because our Jesus first loved us. And we live out of that love. It is already in us. It is already ours. It's who we really are. We just live it out!

PP#15: 1 John 3:11, 13-21

18 Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. 19 This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. 20 Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. 21 Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God.

1 John 3: 8 "Little children, let's not love with words or speech but with action and truth. This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. Dear friends, if our hearts don't condemn us, we have confidence in relationship to God."

Living as heroically means solving problems without brute force, but with the amazing strength of love. It means being willing to leaving behind what we love, to willingly give up our selfish desires, so we can bless others. And it means being grounded in God's love for us. When we do, others will see our actions and truth, shake their heads like the banker in the pilot clip, point to us and say, "this wonderful woman" or man.

I have to leave you with one final clip from the TV series. The bad guys are speeding away in a big black Cadillac. What can Wonder Woman do? She spins once: turns into Wonder Woman. She sees a skateboard. She spins a second time, and now she is wearing skate board safety gear! Off she zooms, and notice the bad guys, who have the Caddy floored, say she's gaining on them! The classic car chase, but with a skate board! Skate boards were the new thing in the 70s, remember? They skid to a stop and make a run for it. Wonder Woman doesn't violently fight them. She merely pushes them to stop them. And then, there's that wonderful cheesy finish. Gotta love it! Enjoy!

Video: "Wonder Woman Season 3 - The Skateboard Whiz"

1:35 minutes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5y_Gro8hRBE

Closing Song - Sanctify

Announcement & Benediction - David

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OCT. 18, 2015

Fall Series: “Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith”

Sermon #5: “Wonder Woman: The Power of Love”

Scripture: 1 John 3:11-21

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself & share about a time you left something familiar to be a blessing.

Context: Look at 1 John 3:11-21. What is going on, earlier in the chapter?

Read: 1 John 3:11-21

1. Verse 11 is such a simple command. It came from Jesus on the night of the Last Supper (John 13:34). Share how you would explain to a 10 year old what this means.
2. Verse 13. Share one example of how you have experienced the hatred of the world because you loved with the love of God.
3. Verse 14. Give an example of how a person who does not love remains in death.
4. Verse 15. How can it be that hating someone makes you a murderer?
5. Verse 16. How does knowing Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross enable us to know love? (Hint: not just know about love, but actually know love itself?)
6. Verse 16. Hopefully, most of us won’t ever need to step in and take the place of someone who is dying. How then can we, to be like Jesus, lay down our lives for others?
7. Verse 17. How does a Christian ever justify not giving absolutely all of our possessions away?
8. Verse 18. Give an example of how we can tend to love with our words but not our actions.
9. Verses 19-20. Often our own hearts condemn us. How are we reassured of God’s acceptance?
10. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?