

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 #4: “The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity”

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

Sermon Text: Galatians 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Source: Drawing from *Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith*.

Theme: God loves diversity and wants the Church to encompass the diversity of God’s creation. Key biblical themes are appreciating diversity, confronting discrimination, and living together in unity.

Blurb: The X-Men are a group of people who were born different. Because of that, people fear and hate them. Even so, they have sworn to protect the very people who are prejudiced against them. They have more ethnic, racial, and gender diversity than any other superhero team. What would you do if you were mistreated, feared, and even hated simply because of the way you were born? In this Sunday’s message we will wrestle with how God’s people are called to confront prejudice, welcome the stranger, and be a diverse community.

Gathering Song

Welcome - Pastor David

Worship Songs - Sanctify

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

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Video: World Communion Day Video

PP#1: “Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith”

“The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity”

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” -Galatians 3:28

“Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith.” “The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity.” Galatians 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

PP#2: *Images of news about the Oregon shooter, IS in Syria, Black Lives Matter, etc.*

Thursday a crazed gunman stormed into an Oregon college and shot to death a teacher and eight students, also wounding seven others. He specifically targeted those who claimed to be Christians. Inconceivable lunacy, but fueled by hate and bigotry against a specific slice of people.

Russia is claiming to hit IS targets in Syria, but interestingly they are also hitting targets that have no IS presence, but happen to be against the rebels opposing the Assad regime. Besides being an obvious political issue, this is an escalating racism issue. Members of the Muslim extremist terrorists IS are brutally targeting anyone who does not believe just like they do. Even Muslims, who do not believe exactly the right way, are condemned.

Refugees spread across Europe, straining the definitions of who is in and who is excluded. The prolonged conflicts throughout the Middle East have deep and lasting racial divisions. Iraq continues to heave with the inability of the Kurds and Sunis to get along. Afghanistan.

This past year has also racial turmoil in our own country. Some police have abused their power to target minorities, and Blacks in particular. Another ice berg tip expression of something that represents a much bigger divide. Some angry people, some of them black, have used violence to express their anger, unfairly targeting members of the police force, again with violence. And this same tension exists between other races within our country, as well.

Injustice based on bigotry, hating a specific slice of people. So many of the tensions across our world all have some anchoring in prejudice. The commodity of human relations world wide seems to be power used to elevate some and lower others.

Even in our own country, which is known as the “melting pot” and filled with such a diverse ethnic makeup, and all of our history of grappling directly with racism and taking bold moves to bring equality, if there is anywhere in the world where people should know how to get along, it should be here. But sadly, we see strong divisions.

PP#3: *Cover Image of X-Men #1 (Sept. 1963)*

Stan Lee of Marvel Comics, got tired of trying to think up creative origin stories for super heroes. The Fantastic Four were hit by cosmic rays. Spiderman was bit by a radioactive spider. Hulk was blasted by gamma rays. And then there were the origin stories for all of their archenemies. So, Stan decided to create a world in which people could be simply born with super powers. That provided an endless supply of super heroes and super villains. He termed them “mutants,” based on a mutation of the human genetic code. This was a natural development; people were born that way.

So, the Marvel world quickly became divided into mutants and non-mutants, and from the beginning, the X-Men story line was based on the issues of prejudice. Now, this was 1963. Racism was all over the news. The X-Men story line offered a safe place to wrestle with the deeper prejudices behind racism. And over the next 50 years, the X-men continued to provide a platform for how we deal with people who are like us and not like us, in actual and perceived ways.

I want you to take a look at the official trailer for the 2000 X-Men movie. Listen for the voices of fear, prejudice, power, hate, and division.

Video Clip: X-Men 2000 Movie Trailer (2:01 minutes)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iy5R5_T243w

PP#4: Where does prejudice come from?

These comics help us see how we people, it seems, have an inherent fear of the unknown. We fear what we do not understand. Could it harm us? Might it force us to change? Familiar is easy, comfortable. We begin to place value on that. Probably most of the time, we do it unconsciously. We oversimplify. We generalize. We extrapolate. We are also inherently superstitious.

When we apply this to people, we create barriers. We insulate ourselves from others, categorize people based on perceived value, compare and contrast. Pride is the root of prejudice. I am best. I am right. I am valuable. The more you are like I am, the more right and valuable you are. The less you are like I am, the less valuable you are. And it gets messy when others who look a lot like I do, or think like I do, join with me, and we begin to wield some power.

PP#5: *Image of Professor Charles Xavier*

Professor Charles Xavier is a mutant. He has hope in the human race's ability to value diversity. And so, he creates a school for other mutants, to make a safe place for them, to teach them to understand and control their powers, and to use them for the common good. His hope is that some day people will not hate mutants, and they will all live in harmony.

But he fights two fronts. One is against prejudiced humans, who label mutants as different and scary and bad. The other front are the mutants who are lashing out against the non-mutants. Their leader is Magneto, who believes that since the mutants have extra powers, they are superior and should rule the world, dominating the non-mutants.

The X-men storyline tackles the way prejudice can go all directions. It is complicated, because it is something in all of us, whether we have or have not. Question: What would you do if you were in a position of power, over others who were not like you? Question: What would you do if you were in a minority position, when others label you as bad and oppress you? Question: What would you do if you saw these dynamics happening between others around you? Question: What would you do if this is something that happens even when you don't try or want it to?

These are key questions for us. You see, we are God's people, called to do God's work in a world like this. When we give our lives to Jesus, we are called to live differently. We are called to live heroically. We are called to work to bring God's plan for our world into reality, *in a way* that God blesses. So, when we place the X-Men in dialogue with the Bible, we can see a clearer picture of God's intention for how we deal with human prejudice.

PP#6: The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity

1. Trusting in God takes away our fear

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10

There is a strong fear component in our prejudice. Yet we see in Scripture that our God helps us in all that we fear. So, our faith is a superpower we have against our fear. We can take our fears to God and know that He will see us through it. We need not act out on our fear in unhealthy ways. We can say over and over again, "It will work out. God will take me through this." It's OK for other people to think differently, to do different things, to be different. What they do cannot ruin me. My God carries me. We will be OK. Fear will not dictate my behavior. I trust God and love you!

PP#7: *Image of Jesus finding faith in the Roman Centurion.*

It's OK for you to not be like me. In fact, scripturally, it is valuable that you are not! God made variety, and God loves diversity. Just a look at the natural world tells you that! God lifts up and celebrates the different! Over and over again Jesus made the different—the minority—the hero of the story. In a male-dominated world, Jesus lifted up women. Jesus pointed the Jews to take note of the

faith of the Gentiles, even Roman soldiers! And in one of His most famous parables, the Good Samaritan, Jesus makes the foreigner the hero for everyone to copy.

Listen to this story again, and listen for: whom Jesus makes the heroes and the bad guys!

PP#8-9 Luke 10:30-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

30 Jesus replied, “A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. 31 Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 32 Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. 33 A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. 34 The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 The next day, he took two full days’ worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, ‘Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.’ 36 What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?”

37 Then the legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Luke 10:30-37 “Jesus replied, ‘A man [like one of us] went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. Now it just so happened that a priest [one of our religious holy and people] was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. Likewise, a Levite [again, one like us, who was living for God] came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. A Samaritan [that’s right, a foreigner, who thinks differently, who acts differently, who was born somewhere else], who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. [This foreigner] went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day, he took two full days’ worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, ‘Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.’ What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?”

Then the legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

PP#10: *Image of the Good Samaritan, where the Samaritan looks like a foreigner.*

According to Jesus, it was not how that man looked or dressed, the color of his skin, or even where he was born, that made the difference. He acted like a neighbor. And Jesus tells them all to go be like that foreigner. He had compassion. He treated the fallen man as a beloved child of God, worthy of his time, attention and care.

PP#11: The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity

1. Trusting in God takes away our fear
2. Seeing diversity as God’s design

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free; there is no longer male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” -Galatians 3:28

Up in Duluth I was talking to Dr. John Thomas, a skilled surgeon who back in the 1960s established the first ER unit in Duluth. One day we were talking about the racial tensions he witnessed back in the 60s. And he commented, “You know, I’ve operated on a lot of different kinds of people. But you know what, regardless of what they look like on the outside, I can tell you that on the inside, we all look the same!”

Trite, but powerful! And this is a strong biblical teaching. God made and loves diversity, but God also made us all the same when it comes to what counts. Our value is based on the same thing. It comes from God creating us!

I visited an old Methodist church building in New Jersey a few years back. Methodists, back in the 1700s, were a very diverse church. White and Black folks worshiped together. Men and women preached from the pulpits. It wasn’t until later that division crept into American Methodism. And I remember reading at the church a quote from a Black man. He said that a miracle happened every Sunday. They would gather into church, and they would all receive that same Holy Communion, side by side, shoulder to shoulder. They may be labeled as different outside the church, but at the altar, they were all equal before God! You see, in God’s eyes, “there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Now, one quick caveat. God’s love for diversity does not mean that God thinks everything is fine. God has very clear guidelines for how He wants His people to live. If you live other than God’s design, that doesn’t mean you have any less value. Everyone is a beloved child of God and needs to be treated that way. But that doesn’t mean you can think or do whatever you choose. When we live heroically, we continue to love those who are different, and we try to help—in loving and forgiving ways—those who aren’t living God’s way, to find that way. And we have to be careful about this! For we do this always with humility and with a clear understanding that we are also forgiven.

PP#12: The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity

1. Trusting in God takes away our fear
2. Seeing diversity as God’s design
3. Keeping people human

“But now, this is what the LORD says—He who created you, Jacob, He who formed you, Israel: ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine.’” - Isaiah 43:1

Jesus walked around and looked people in the face. He saw people as individuals. He talked with them. He walked with them. He ate with them. He sought out those who were overlooked. He lifted them up. One of the most powerful antidotes to prejudice is getting to know individual people personally. You see, one of the ways we invoke our prejudice is to make blanket statements, to group people together, to make them faceless. We call them by their label, how we categorize them. “All of those kind of people, they...” Yes, categorizing is a way that our brain makes sense of the world. But that doesn’t mean we give it free reign. If you truly want to combat prejudice, then go make personal relationships with people from other slices of humanity. Become friends with people who look different than you, who act differently, to think differently, who believe differently. Those bonds of friendships will help you resist lumping whole groups of people together. Spend some time with them. Walk in their shoes. We fear what we don’t know. So get to know them!

PP#13: *Dark, menacing image of the Wolverine*

You know, this offers a corrective to the other sides of prejudice, too. In the X-Men stories, the character of Wolverine has developed into this dark mutant who lashes out in violence. He's supposed to be a hero, but often acts out of anger at being treated so unfairly. Somehow our culture seems to glorify this violence and justifies it. In the older comics, he fought villains who were attacking him. But more recently, especially in his recent movie, he acts violently against people he wrongly perceives as a threat, and seems to justify killing as a means to an end. He places his values above their value as people. To him they are not individuals, but problems.

PP#14: *Image of Jesus in front of the crowd being condemned.*

Jesus was a victim of violence. He became a faceless problem that had to be solved. He was powerful beyond imagining, but He did not use His power to lash out. He showed us the path of non-violence. And we choose to follow Him.

I used to live in Atlanta, GA. I've been to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's birth home, his church, and his grave. One of the most impressive things I learned about him was how he continually worked to keep his demonstrators from turning violent, returning violence for violence. You know, that must have been so hard! How tempting it would be to lash out. To this day it is so common to hear about demonstrations turning violent. As if the person charged to keep the peace isn't a person and deserves the demonstrator's violence. I reread King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail," written to his demonstrators. He encouraged them to always remain peaceful, for then they are demonstrating the true values of God for all people.

In many stories of the X-Men, when battling people who hate and direct violence towards them, they choose to stop fighting and stand down. They used their super powers against super villains, but Professor Xavier taught them to not retaliate against prejudice. They are always people.

PP#15: *Image of female X-Men: Jean Grey, Storm, Rogue, The Scarlet Witch, etc.*

One more. When Stan Lee created the X-Men, he created the most ethnically, racially and gender diverse group of heroes ever assembled. There were heroes of all skin color. There were heroes from Russia during the era of the Cold War. And for the first time, women had bonafide roles as full-level super heroes, and even served as leaders of the team. The name *X-Men* for the team, may be a dated name from the 60s, but it has not hindered the leading role of women. The new members of the team struggle to get along and do not always understand each other's words or actions, but they eventually learn to work together.

PP#16: *The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity*

1. Trusting in God takes away our fear
2. Seeing diversity as God's design
3. Keeping people human
4. Become a Diverse Community

Jesus prayed, "I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me." John 17:21

As Christians, we can create our churches to become diverse communities. Throughout history churches have often followed culture rather than Scripture. Churches have been harborers and proponents of deep and violent prejudice. But churches can also be living examples of God's true family. Churches are to be a foretaste of God's intended culture, demonstrated within this culture.

Churches can be sanctuaries for those who need a place where they are safe, loved, and accepted for who they are. The church can also be a school, giving people a sense of self-worth by teaching us to use whatever gifts and abilities we may have for the cause of what is right. And the church can be a mission center that finds ways to help people help others and make the world a better place, by what we each do individually, and by what we can do together to change the systems and structures that promote prejudice.

PP#17: *Top page of the two pages at <http://imgur.com/a/bfHR3>*

The undying hope of the Uncanny X-Men is that one day all people will live together in peace and harmony, where all will be seen as equally human, and just as valued. Mutants, which serve in the X-Men story as code for whatever we call that slice of humanity, are not a problem or a mutation from what should be, but rather are natural expressions of the diversity of the human race.

Interestingly, that is also God's vision for the world. And we, the Church, are called to live it out right now. That means in our own lives to give our fear to God, to celebrate diversity as God's creation, to make friends with those who are different than we are, and to come together in churches that reflect the diversity of God's world, that offer sanctuary to those who are oppressed, that teach people to use their unique giftings for good, and that act as mission centers that tear down injustice and prejudice in whatever forms they present themselves.

This may seem to be an impossible task. But we have special gifts, given to us so we can live heroically. And we are not alone. Our God is on a mission in this world, and we are a part of it. That's the true definition of uncanny!

Offering

Prayers

Holy Communion

Closing Song - Sanctify

Announcement & Benediction - David

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OCT. 4, 2015

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

Sermon #4: “The Uncanny X-Men - Dealing with Discrimination and Diversity”

Scripture: Luke 10:25-37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself and share about a time you made friends with someone who looked very different.

Context: Look at Luke 10. What is going on, especially the first 24 verses?

Read: Luke 10:25-37

1. Discuss the racial differences of the man robbed, the Pharisee, the Levite, and the Samaritan. Think through where each were born, what kind of privileges each enjoyed, and why they were on that road.

2. As Jesus begins telling the story, whom are His hearers (us!) supposed to identify with?

3. By the end of the story, whom are His hearers (us!) supposed to identify with?

4. Share a time when you felt like a Samaritan, meaning an unwanted foreigner.

5. Share a time you saw a Good Samaritan in action.

6. Have you ever feared or looked down upon a group or individual who was different from you and later realized that you were wrong to do so? If so, what helped you realize you were wrong? What did you learn from that?

7. What kind of experience do you think someone would have in our church if they didn't have the same skin color, or some other majority attribute?

8. Tell of a meaningful friendship you have or have had with someone very different from you. How would someone else belittling them make you feel? Why?

9. How can our church do a better job of fighting discrimination and prejudice?

10. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?