

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

Sermon #1: “Fantastic Four: Family, Friends, and Foes”

Scripture: Matthew 5:38-48

Text: “We who are powerful need to be patient with the weakness of those who don’t have power, and not please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good in order to build them up.” -Romans 15:1-2

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

Theme: Christians are called to live heroically. We have the power of the Holy Spirit that makes us able to have victory over our struggles. We have a unique calling and a special identity. When we put Marvel superheroes in dialogue with the Bible, we can discover how we can live heroically in our everyday lives.

Blurb: This Sunday is Superhero Sunday! We’re starting our new series, Marvelous Myths, where we look at popular Marvel superheroes to see examples and lessons of how we all can live heroic lives. Our first message uses the Fantastic Four, four ordinary people who are infused with cosmic rays that cause them each to develop unique superpowers. They commit to work for good and to fight crime. Yet their biggest challenges are learning to get along and work together. This is a powerful message we all need to hear! We are ordinary people infused with divine power to work for good. Yet sometimes our biggest challenges are around learning to work together and getting along. You don’t want to miss this exciting issue...er...I mean message. “Fantastic Four: Family, Friends and Foes.”

Gathering Song: - Sanctify

Welcome - Pastor David

Welcome - Introductions, Welcome Center

Turn off cell phones but like us on Facebook first. Can from our website.

Worship Songs - Sanctify

Worship Prayer - Andrew

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

Prayers - Andrew

Opening Video Clip (38 seconds)

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

“Fantastic Four: Family, Friends, and Foes”

“We who are powerful need to be patient with the weakness of those who don’t have power, and not please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good in order to build them up.” -Romans 15:1-2

“Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith.” “Fantastic Four: Family, Friends, and Foes” “We who are powerful need to be patient with the weakness of those who don’t have power, and not please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good in order to build them up.” -Romans 15:1-2

PP#2: *Image of Action Comics #1, 1938.*

Heroes went super with Action Comics #1, 1938. Until that time heroes were ordinary people who did extraordinary things, like Dick Tracy, The Lone Ranger, and Tarzan. Superman was the first superhero, a hero with super powers. Since then, a myriad of “supers” have come on the scene.

PP#3: *Image of the Justice League, including Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, Green Lantern.*

There are two main superhero “worlds.” DC, or Detective Comics, introduced Superman, but soon added Batman, Aquaman, WonderWoman, The Flash, The Green Lantern, and many others.

PP#4: *Image of Spiderman and the Avengers (Hulk, Thor, Iron Man, Captain American.*

The other main comic world is Marvel Comics, whose superheroes include Spiderman, Captain America, the Hulk, the X-men, Iron Man and Thor.

I have always been a Marvel-man, myself, and I used to collect comics back in the 80s when you could afford them...you know, 50¢. Now the average price is \$3-\$4! ~~I had quite an extensive comic book collection before I was married, all preserved with cards in Mylar sleeves. If you ever want to hear an embarrassing story, ask me to you about when I sold them all!~~

PP#5: *Images from recent Superhero movie covers, both DC and Marvel.*

Superhero movies have become really popular over the last decade or so. They’re not just for kids anymore! Lots of people are loving them, some of them being high-budget blockbuster megahits. They’re becoming part of our popular culture.

That’s got me thinking. How are these superhero stories influencing us? What are they teaching us? How are they shaping us?

There are some things I hope we don’t want to learn from them, like how superheroes always fight their way out of problems. I hope we’re not learning to use violence to solve our problems. Or, that the world is cleanly divided into good guys and bad guys. Reality’s not that simple.

PP#6: *Image of Mighty Mouse, with his saying, “Here I come to save the day!”*

And I hope we’re not learning that when we are in trouble, that we have to wait until someone amazing comes in to save us. “Here I come to save the day!” As my father often quipped, “Don’t just sit there, do something!”

Even with all this, I think there are good things to learn from the superhero stores. Their surging popularity certainly suggests that they are finding a broad connection. Who here—raise your hands—has seen a superhero movie in the last five years? Wow!

PP#7: *Stan Lee posing with Spiderman, and cover of “Stan Lee presents the Amazing Spiderman”*

Part of what has made superheroes so popular recently is the genius of Stan Lee. Stan Lee is the legendary Marvel superhero co-creator and editor. He's still alive, and he makes cameos in most of the recent Marvel movies.

You see, before Stan Lee, superheroes were great because they had great powers. They were stronger, faster, had special powers, and defeated all their problems with their super powers. Superman. There was nothing he couldn't do! Even his breath had a power! Plot line: Problem or villain. People helpless. Arrive Superman. He used his awesome powers to save the day.

PP#8: *Image of the famous Spiderman upside down kiss from the movie.*

But when Stan Lee took the helm of Marvel Comics in 1960, he introduced a new idea. He created superheroes who were regular people who happened to get powers. Then, even though they had powers, they were still ordinary people. And the plot line was almost always twisted with the ordinary problems they have as people. We can relate! That's part of what makes them so popular. We can identify with their struggles to do the right thing and to persevere in the midst of adversity.

PP#9: Christians are called to live heroic lives!

I think that we can draw from these heroes, helpful ways that *we can live heroic lives*, too. This is, after all, the calling of our Christian faith. God calls us to live heroic lives, extraordinary lives, lives fraught with danger and struggle, but lives in which we are given power to rise up and overcome. We are sent by God into a world full of pain and trouble, to bring help and joy and peace.

PP#10: 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

When we place these stories in dialogue with our real superhero book, the Bible, we can find helpful ways that we can live heroically. In the Bible we see that we, actually, have special powers, too. When we give our lives to Jesus, Jesus gives us the power of the Holy Spirit living within us. The Holy Spirit works in us, making us able to do what we cannot do on our own. It may not be super strength, or the ability to fly, but the Holy Spirit makes us able to speak words of healing, do acts of justice, to come along side others in a way that restores them and gives them hope. We show God's love in tangible ways...pretty amazing! This Power makes us able to live differently and overcome impossible situations. We are ordinary people, but we have an extra-ordinary calling, and we are filled with the special power of the Holy Spirit to live it out.

PP#11: Romans 12:5-6a "Though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other. We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us.

1 Cor. 12:7 "A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good."

Romans 12:5 says how God made us a team, each with special gifting, which we use to help one another. "Though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong

to each other. We have different gifts that are consistent with God's grace that has been given to us." Then, over in 1 Corinthians 12:7, Paul says that these gifts are for blessing others. "A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good." See? We are God's superheroes!

PP#12: *Cover of the first The Fantastic Four comic*

Today we're taking a closer look at Stan Lee's first creation. His first superhero comic was not about a superhero, however. It was about a *team* of superheroes. It was the Fantastic Four. They were four ordinary people who were launched into space and were hit by mysterious cosmic rays. When they came back, each had a special power. Reed Richards could stretch like rubber. His girl friend, Sue Storm, could turn invisible. Later she became Reed's wife and learned to create invisible force fields. Sue's younger brother, Johnny Storm, could turn into fire and could fly. Ben Grimm, Reed's best friend, was turned into a super-strong rock man, called, The Thing. When they realized their superpowers, they quickly agreed to team up and fight for good in the world.

PP#13: *"The Fantastic Four: image from the bottom of <http://www.dialbforblog.com/archives/486/>*

With The Fantastic four, Stan Lee introduced into superheroes the interpersonal conflict that regular people struggle with. The new team, you see, never had learned to get along to start with. Individually, they each had fantastic powers. But over and over again we got to see how their real problems weren't the villains. Their real problems were themselves! They struggled to trust each other, to help each other, to not let their personalities clash. Reed is a brainiac who is too attached to his work and ignores his wife. Her temper flairs at being neglected. They drift apart. Johnny the Torch is a head-strung teenager who only cares about what he wants. Ben the Thing is a solid, careful man, who finds teenagers selfish, reckless, and annoying. The two of them bicker constantly, rubbing like sandpaper. The team isn't much of a team. They can't get along...with each other, or even others!

PP#14: *Image of a family of four, or four people, fighting/arguing.*

We understand this! We struggle with this. We see ourselves in them. How are your relationships with those closest to you? How do you treat your family, when you're not in public? How do you interact with your annoying coworker who always seems to think differently? Do you treat them as the gifts from God that they are? Do you save the best for those you love the most? Can you do projects together? Can you drive together without arguing? Is it always their fault?

PP#15: Mark 12:28-31

One of the legal experts heard their dispute and saw how well Jesus answered them. He came over and asked him, "Which commandment is the most important of all?"

Jesus replied, "The most important one is Israel, listen! Our God is the one Lord, 30 and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these."

Let's take a core look at one of the most familiar passages of the Bible. The most important commandment of them all? "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your

being, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this, You will love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.”

Easy to say. Hard to do. How are you doing on this? You know, when we look at how the Fantastic Four struggle to love each other, we can see our own struggles better.

In the 2005 Fantastic Four movie, Dr. Doom is wreaking havoc. The four of them go out to save the day, but nothing they can do seems to work. They argue, they don't work together, they don't trust each other. Even though they each have fantastic powers, and they have developed them well, Dr. Doom is able to pick them apart, and they each fail miserably.

Ben gives up on them, and uses one of Reed's machines to turn himself back to normal. Reed is captured and Dr. Doom keeps him so cold he can't stretch. Sue and Johnny argue, and Dr. Doom launches a missile to take them out. It all seems hopeless.

PP#16: Fantastic Four: Family, Friends, Foes

1. Loving those closest to you requires sacrifice

A key component of love is sacrifice. It's putting the other person first. You know, we struggle with this. It's one of those things we talk about, but we really have a hard time doing it.

Ben Grimm is finally turned back to normal. He was so tired of people freaking out when they saw him, calling him a monster. More than anything else, he wanted to be normal again. And he finally got that wish. But then he sees his mates getting beaten up. They are doomed.

Johnny, who has been so irritating, suddenly sacrifices himself and leads the missile away from his sister and Ben. And then, Ben, in an act of self-sacrifice, gives up his dream of a normal life, and goes back into the machine to turn himself back into The Thing. This time, he knows, there is no reversing it. Take a look at this video clip from the movie.

Video Clip: “Fantastic Four - Torch Vs. Missile”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MyVAj8aHCtk> (2:05 seconds)

Play only 1:10 seconds, until Ben says “What did I do” and then looks at the chamber

A key part of loving your neighbor as yourself, a key component of becoming a team, they each discover—and painfully—is not just for each of them simply to be the best he could be, and use his powers in amazing ways. They each had to learn personal sacrifice for the sake of others. Love is putting others first. Love is wanting what is best for others. Love is acting on that wanting.

PP#17: Fantastic Four: Family, Friends, Foes

1. Loving those closest to you requires sacrifice

2. Loving your neighbor means including the stranger

Leviticus 19:34 “Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself.”

Remember the racial division of the 60s? Well, in 1965 and 1966, Marvel had “The Fantastic Four” meet a string of new foes from different cultures that would become key characters in the Marvel Universe. The Inhumans are a newly discovered race of people who had remained hidden. They look strange, have funny customs, and they have very different ways of behaving. Galactus and the Silver Surfer are aliens who come to earth. And the Black Panther is a black prince who first defeats the Fantastic Four in battle, and then invites them to share a meal together!

PP#18: *Image of the Fantastic Four and the Black Panther.*

Each time, they first fight the new folks. They are different and cannot understand each other. But then, each time, they find a common bond. They each realize the other isn't evil. And over time, begin to build a relationship. The Black Panther becomes the first major black super hero in major comics. And in the years ahead the Fantastic Four team up with their new friends and allies time and again and work together.

Jesus says to welcome the stranger as your own. This was an old commandment. Christians cannot justify racism. In our current culture of racism flashing across the news, we can look to how the Fantastic Four stopped fighting—and teamed up with—those who are strangers, and those who may seem strange.

PP#19: Fantastic Four: Family, Friends, Foes

1. Loving those closest to you requires sacrifice
2. Loving your neighbor means including the stranger
3. Loving your enemies gives them a chance

Matthew 5: 44 “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you.”

Loving your enemies is a radical Christian idea. No other major religion before Jesus ever taught such a thing. But Jesus turns everything upside down on human retaliation.

PP#20: *Cover image of Fantastic Four #51*

Many critics consider *Fantastic Four #51*, June 1966, the greatest comic book of all time. It's called, “This Man, This Monster.” In the story, a brilliant, unnamed scientist has become so jealous of Reed Richards that he's bent on killing him. So, he volunteers to work alongside Reed. The name of the story juxtapositions The Thing, who looks like a monster, but is a friend, and the scientist, who looks like a man, but is a monster waiting to strike.

However, as the scientist works alongside Reed, an amazing thing happens. As he gets to know Reed, he is struck by his humility, his nobility, and his willingness to risk himself to help humankind. Then, when an experiment goes wrong, the scientist suddenly sacrifices his own life to save Reed. As he faces death, the unnamed scientist thinks, “As for me, I'm not gonna feel sorry for myself! Not many men get a second chance to make up for the rotten things they've done in their lifetime! I guess I'm luckier than most! I got that chance!”

The scientist goes unnamed, perhaps so we can see in him our enemy, and so we can see in our enemy some good and a chance for redemption. Loving our enemies is so important because it means seeing them as God does. This doesn't mean that we aren't prudent and don't work to stop oppression and evil. But we must always love our enemies. We cannot vilify them and then justify treating them badly. Consider, who are your enemies? Do you vilify them? Can you see God in them? Can you love them? It's hard. But it's living heroically.

PP#21-23: Matthew 5:38-48

38 “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. 39 But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your

right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. 40 When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. 41 When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. 42 Give to those who ask, and don't refuse those who wish to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you 45 so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? 48 Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete."

Jesus says, "You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you that you must not oppose those who want to hurt you. If people slap you on your right cheek, you must turn the left cheek to them as well. When they wish to haul you to court and take your shirt, let them have your coat too. When they force you to go one mile, go with them two. Give to those who ask, and don't refuse those who wish to borrow from you.

"You have heard that it was said, You must love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who harass you so that you will be acting as children of your Father who is in heaven. He makes the sun rise on both the evil and the good and sends rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love only those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing? Don't even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore, just as your heavenly Father is complete in showing love to everyone, so also you must be complete."

PP#24: Living heroically:

1. Loving those closest to you requires sacrifice
2. Loving your neighbor means including the stranger
3. Loving your enemies gives them a chance

We are like the Fantastic Four! We each have amazing abilities and skills. We each bring something special and important. God has given into each of us His Holy Spirit to produce gifts and graces in us. These gifts are given with the intention of blessing others: family, friends and foes. Love is how we Christians use our powers. That means sacrificially loving others, those closest to us, those we consider our friends, those who are strangers to us, and even those who are against us.

In the 2005 movie, the four each choose to sacrifice themselves for the others, and for the greater good. They begin to work together, trust each other, depend on each other, help each other. They use their abilities to complement the others. They encourage each other and push others into success.

In the end, both in the comics and in the movies, the Fantastic Four don't win because of their unique powers. They win because they learn to work together, to trust each other, to stop acting like individuals and to sacrifice like a team. This is a pretty good visual for what love looks like.

I'm going to have you watch the very end of the movie. No big spoiler here, because guess what, they win! They work together and defeat Dr. Doom. Big shock. Unfortunately, however, they did not find a way to love Dr. Doom into being good. But then again, Dr. Doom is evil.

So, I want you to overlook that, and instead watch how they work together, treat each other, talk to each other, show love for each other.

Video Clip: “Fantastic Four - Fantastic 4 Vs. Doom”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPRjkUwfzUc> (4:42 seconds)

Play 3:35 seconds, until Reed says, “Well, we do have the suits” and screen goes dark

Church, I call us to living the heroic Christian lives God wants from us. It is not easy. It takes concerted effort, determination, and intantionality. We are each ordinary people, but we have special talents, abilities, and powers. And when we live heroically, loving and working with others as a true team, together, we can be fantastic!

Amen!

If time: **Greeting Time** - Pastor David

Let’s start right now by showing our love for one another. Turn and greet those around you, and speak something nice to them. Give them a compliment, and build them up. Show your love!

Closing Song - Sanctify

Announcement & Benediction - David

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SEPT. 13, 2015

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

Sermon #1: “Fantastic Four: Family, Friends, and Foes”

Scripture: Matthew 5:38-48

Opening prayer

Introductions:

Introduce yourself and share about a time you really worked well on a team.

Context: Look at Matthew chapter 5. What is going on?

Read: Matthew 5:38-48

1. In what ways is it easy to live by the motto, “an eye for an eye”?
2. Do you think that Jesus meant in verse 39 to let people take advantage of you? Why or why not?
3. What does verse 40 say about law suits?
4. Share about a time when someone you knew was asked for help and went “the second mile.”
5. How do you interpret verse 42 when loaning to someone may enable destructive behavior?
6. What does it look like to love your enemy? Give some specific examples.
7. Why do you think praying for those who bother you may be so important?
8. According to verse 45, what is God’s attitude to those who do evil and unrighteousness?
9. Verses 46-47 seems so very obvious. Yet, if you think more deeply about it, it describes how we behave much of the time. What might it look like to not reserve our good for those we love?
10. How would you explain verse 48 to a new Christian? What could you point to in your life to offer as an example?
11. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?