

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

Sermon #2: “Spider-Man - Responsibility and Hard Times”

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-10 and Luke 18:9-14

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

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

Theme: Peter Parker learns to take on the responsibility of his new power. We also need to live into the responsibility of our calling as Christians, to live heroically.

Blurb: What does Spider-Man have to do with our life of faith? At first glance, it seems downright silly to try to draw lessons for living in the real world from someone who wears red and blue tights and has the proportional strength and abilities of a spider. Yet Spider-Man Is the most human of heroes. In his everyday life as Peter Parker, spider-Man is just a normal guy who, despite the hard times that come his way, tries to deal with those problems and live his life in a responsible manner. This Sunday we will put Spider-Man in dialogue with the Bible and discover ways that we can also live heroic lives, despite all the obstacles that stand in our way and the hard times we must endure.

Hymn Sing

Welcome - Pastor David

Greeting time

Worship Songs - Sanctify

Worship Prayer - Pastor David

Baptism of Elliot Ruter

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

Prayers - Pastor David

Offering

Opening Video Clip (38 seconds)

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

“Spider-Man - Responsibility and Hard Times”

“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

“Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith.” “Spider-Man - Responsibility and Hard Times” The words of Jesus: “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)

PP#2: *Cover image of the movie Spiderman.*

Spider-Man, the movie, launched it all! It was the first megga hit of Marvel superheroes at the box office. When it opened in 2002, it was, at the time, the largest debut weekend box office haul in history. Since then, there have been dozens of Marvel superhero movies, and their popularity has soared. Three of the top 10 grossing films of all time are Marvel Superhero movies of the last three years.

PP#3: *Cover image of the comic Amazing Fantasy #15*

Spider-Man also launched it all in the comic strips, too. When Stan Lee introduced him in 1962, he was an instant hit, and Spiderman became the most famous and enduring Marvel superhero.

For those of you who need a little background, there are two main superhero universes. DC is older, and has the heroes of Superman, Wonderwoman, Batman, and Green Lantern. The Marvel Universe is Spiderman, Hulk, Thor, Iron Man, the Avengers, and the Guardians of the Galaxy.

Spider-Man's popularity came from Stan Lee's desire to introduce a novel idea into comics. Rather than showing superheroes as perfect people with amazing powers, he created characters who were ordinary people who struggled with real life issues. Spider-Man's origin sets this up.

PP#4: *Image: Amazing Fantasy #15 "splash page"*

Enter: ordinary, nerdy teenage Peter Parker. His parents had died when he was a baby, and his kindly Aunt May and Uncle Ben are raising him. Being a science nerd, Peter attends an exhibit on radioactivity at the Science Hall. During the experiment, a spider hangs down from its web and accidentally fall into a radioactive ray. Charged with a fantastic amount of radioactivity, it bites Peter, passing on the radioactivity into him. Soon afterwards Peter begins to realize that although he looks the same, he now has the amazing powers of a spider: strength, agility, clinging to walls, and the ability to sense impending danger. He can also shoot webs out of his wrists. See? Ordinary guy, superhero powers. From then on, the plot of Spider-Man twists with Peter Parkers' own life issues.

These stories, like the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man, have captured the public's attention, as movies—the new storytelling medium—have taken them mainstream. We connect with them, in part, because they show people struggling with everyday life issues. We can identify! They connect with that inner struggle we have of wanting to live right, do the right thing, struggling between what we want and what we ought to do, trying to figure out what even is right and good. It's hard! And Stan Lee introduce that into the superhero world.

PP#5: 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

I think that we can gain a lot by taking a closer look at these superhero stories. There are all kinds of messages here, and they are shaping our culture, and us. And if we can place them in dialogue with the greatest superhero book of all time—the Bible—we can discover amazing ways that we can live heroic lives, too.

You see, when we choose to follow Jesus, we are called to live heroic lives. We live differently: having different values than the world around us. We have a different responsibility:

being sent by God into a hurting world to help make it a better place. We have special powers: the Holy Spirit living within us, making us able to do what we cannot do on our own. We have the ability impact our world for good! 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.

So, we're going to be spending a few weeks with Marvel superheroes. We're going to draw from the Bible to see how we can live heroically. Today we're looking at The Amazing Spider-Man!

PP#6: Picture of Peter Parker crying: half way down the web page:

As a normal teenager, Peter decides to use his powers to get money. He first becomes a professional wrestler and creates a spider-man costume to hide his identity. He then goes on TV doing tricks for money. After one of his performances, a thief comes running through the studio, with a policeman giving chase calling for anyone to stop him. Peter, still in costume, simply lets him pass by. The policeman is furious with him. "What's with you mister? All you hadda do was trip him, or hold him just for a minute!" Peter says, "That's your job! I'm through being pushed around by anyone! From now on I just look out for number one, and that means me!" The policeman says, "I oughtta run you in....," but Peter just walks away.

A few days later Peter comes home to find that a robber has killed his Uncle Ben. Peter, as Spider-Man, tracks him down to an abandoned warehouse. He knocks the criminal out cold, and then discovers it was the same thief that Peter had let past him back at the TV studio.

In a scene that made superhero history, Peter takes off his mask and reveals that he is crying. This is the first time a superhero had ever cried in comic world. He had an internal storm raging. The bubbles above his head show this thoughts: "My fault--all my fault! If only I had stopped him when I could have! But I didn't--and now, Uncle Ben--is dead." Then, as Spider-Man fades away at the end of the comic, Stan Lee quotes President Truman and pens some of the most famous words in comics "And a lean, silent figure slowly fades into the gathering darkness, aware at last that in this world, with great power there must also come--great responsibility."

The 2002 movie placed these words into Uncle Ben's mouth, before he died. Peter is struggling with his new powers, and is making some bad, selfish, choices. Take a look.

Video Clip: "Uncle Ben- With Great Power Comes Great responsibilities--HD" (2:22 seconds)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_5d6rTQcU2U

PP#7: 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,

In the movie, Uncle Ben's words shape Peter for the rest of the story.

Stan Lee is quoting President Truman with the words, but they come from the real superhero. In Luke 12:48, 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."

You see, the Bible is all about ordinary, average people encountering Jesus and being changed. His earliest followers had their own limitations and their own foibles, and they struggled to follow Him well. We may be tempted write ourselves off because we can't be super-Christians. But the Bible shows, in every case, average people like you and me, making a difference in the world because of Jesus in us. When Jesus is saying this quote, He is talking to us. We have been given much, and much is demanded from us.

PP#8: Spider-Man - Responsibility and Hard Times

1. We are called to be heroic in hard times

Jesus said, "I've said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have trouble. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world." -John 16:33

Spider-Man's villains are almost always extensions of the struggles he has inside. We see them vividly in characters, but then we can also see them in ourselves. He is also engulfed in problems and hardships. With Uncle Ben dead, he and Aunt May fall into poverty. Peter loves her so much, and feels the responsibility to provide for her, even though he doesn't know how. Then, in another novel idea for comics, Spider-Man is not loved by the public. His image is marred in fear, distrust, and hatred. No matter how hard he tries, Spider-Man is framed as a menace. He is out there trying to help people, he neglects his personal life, his studies, his jobs, all for people who don't like him. And so, Peter quickly comes to resent his powers and the responsibility they bring. He can never seem to manage it, pull it off, no matter how he tries. He is perpetually caught among his responsibilities.

We understand this. We struggle with this. No matter how hard we try, we just can't seem to keep it together. Our obligations pull on us relentlessly. Sometimes we think that being a Christian should make things easier. We have this God who can do anything. He has given us His power within us. So, why is it so hard!

The reality is that we will have hard times. In John 16:33, Jesus says, "In this life you will have trouble." He also says to His followers, "Daily pick up your crosses and follow me" (Luke 14:27). The Christian life does not promise an easy life. However, we have someone to turn to, in the midst of them. He has overcome the world, and He will help us through our troubles. We can have peace!

PP#9: Image where Peter throws away his costume, from Amazing Spider-Man #50

A couple of years later, in another historic comic story, Peter is unable to save his beloved girlfriend, Gwen Stacy, and she dies. He failed to protect her. In fact, it was because he was Spider-Man that she ended up dying. He believes it would be so much better if he gave it all up. He throws out his costume, thinking, "All my problems...all my tough breaks...are due to being spider-Man!! If I were just an ordinary Joe...all the...worries I've got would just melt away."

In the movie, Peter gives up being Spider-Man, and for a time, at least, all the world seems perfect. This scene is underlayed by a happy song, "Raindrops keep falling on my head." Take a look.

Video Clip: Spider-Man 2 - Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head (1:45 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL8hVXSdNM>

PP#10: Spider-Man - Responsibility and Hard Times

1. We are called to be heroic in hard times
2. Responsibility means serving others

"Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith." -Galatians 6:9-10

We may be sore tempted to throw off the Christian life. Enough of this caring about everyone else. Time to look out for #1. We get tired of working for no credit, never having people appreciate the good we do. My wife often quips, “No good deed goes unpunished.” We get tired of things never coming together, getting any easier. It’s hard to sustain the pace of our Christian calling. We wear out.

In Stan Lee’s story line, the plot moves that eventually Peter embraces his inner altruism, his personal desire to do good, and goes back to take up the costume.

As Christians, we are called by a deeper calling than that. We are called by a God who is Himself good, and who has declared of world as good. We are called into living for this God, and helping make God’s plan for our world a reality. We all have been given power. But that power doesn’t mean that we use it to make our lives easier and trouble-free. It means that everyone has uncles, and we all are given power and chances to do good, and if we don’t take them, then we let evil flourish. Remember the baptismal vows earlier? “Will you do all in your power to resist evil and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?” We all have superhero responsibility!

PP#11: Isaiah 40:28-31

“Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He doesn’t grow tired or weary. His understanding is beyond human reach, giving power to the tired and reviving the exhausted. Youths will become tired and weary, young men will certainly stumble; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will fly up on wings like eagles; they will run and not be tired; they will walk and not be weary.”

And one of our most important superpowers is God’s strength in us. Yes, we grow weary. We cannot sustain doing the good we are called to do. Our own strength is not enough. But we have a special strength, a super strength! God’s grace in us softens our hearts. It renews our energy. It recommit us to the work. It’s a partnership. We are carried. The beautiful Eagles’ Wings passage in Isaiah 40.

PP#12-13: Galatians 6:1-10

1 Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won’t be tempted too. 2 Carry each other’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks they are important when they aren’t, they’re fooling themselves. 4 Each person should test their own work and be happy with doing a good job and not compare themselves with others....A person will harvest what they plant. 8 Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. 9 Let’s not get tired of doing good, because in time we’ll have a harvest if we don’t give up. 10 So then, let’s work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.

This is how we are able to live into our Christian calling to responsibility. Galatians 6 says, “Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who are spiritual should restore someone like this with a spirit of gentleness. Watch out for yourselves so you won’t be tempted too. Carry each other’s burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks

they are important when they aren't, they're fooling themselves. Each person should test their own work and be happy with doing a good job and not compare themselves with others....A person will harvest what they plant. 8 Those who plant only for their own benefit will harvest devastation from their selfishness, but those who plant for the benefit of the Spirit will harvest eternal life from the Spirit. 9 Let's not get tired of doing good, because in time we'll have a harvest if we don't give up. 10 So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith."

We all can do this. We are all a part of a wider community, and we have responsibilities to it. We all have so many ways to look beyond our own interests and serve those around us. Yesterday I was on my way to meetings and a funeral so couldn't be at the Community Care food distribution this month. But I stopped in to grab a chart on my way out. And there were common, ordinary people all over the place, being heroes. Some were smiling at people as they came in. Others talked with people. Others were teaching and instructing. Others were handing food out. Others were carrying it to people's cars. Others were fixing cars! This is what it looks like to live heroically.

PP#14: Spider-Man - Responsibility and Hard Times

1. We are called to be heroic in hard times
2. Responsibility means serving others
3. Confronting Our Own Dark Side

"From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise." -Philippians 4:8

In the 80s, when I was collecting Spider-Man comics, there was a series of Spider-Man with a black costume. He gets the costume from a mysterious alien world. It seems to increase his abilities. But after a while, he notices the costume starts to affect him, seeming to tempt him to act badly. We eventually find out that the costume is actually an alien life form trying to take him over. The alien brings out the already-present dark, negative character traits inside of Peter, the ones he is trying to suppress and conquer: ego, self-centeredness, anger, desire for revenge, and worse. Peter defeats it, but the costume eventually bonds with another person who also hates Peter. Together they become Venom, a larger, more violent version of Spider-Man, that becomes one of Spider-Man's most dangerous enemies. Remember, I said most of Spider-Man's enemies are embodiments of his own inner struggles? Venom stars in the third Spider-Man movie, 2007.

PP#15: *Image of black-suit Spider-Man, or Venom*

We may not have an alien trying to take over our bodies, but there are many influences that can draw out the worst in us. Perhaps we have certain friends who are so negative that they bring out negativity in us as well. Perhaps we watch some TV shows or movies that encourage selfish, mean-spirited behaviors, justifying them as innocent or even good. Perhaps we listen to radio stations that degrade or demonize those who don't think a certain way. Perhaps we take into our bodies chemicals that change our behavior, be it caffeine, or alcohol, or even sugar! Perhaps we read postings that encourage and rationalize our selfish, sinful desires.

All kinds of things we allow to tempt us. But we have the power to resist. We can choose to allow in only those things that are noble, good, trustworthy and true. Just as Peter had to put away the black suit, so we need to put a filter on what we allow. It's a willful, constant choice.

One very potent power God gives us to do this is grace. The Bible says that we all sin. But we are saved from that sin by God's grace. "For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). We receive the grace of God applied to all the wrongs that we do.

It is when we think that we can do it on our own that we get into trouble. Our pride gets in the way, and keeps us from treating our weaknesses in honest humility.

PP#16: Luke 18:9-15

Jesus told this parable: "Two people went up to the temple to pray. One was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed about himself, 'God, I thank you that I'm not like everyone else—crooks, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week. I give a tenth of everything I receive.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to look toward heaven. Rather, he struck his chest and said, 'God, show mercy to me, a sinner.' I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee. All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up."

Jesus told a parable about a pious-looking man and a known sinner. The proud man who trusted in himself didn't see his own sin, and walked in it. The known sinner, however, was humble, and asked for help. That humility can help us take a more honest look at our own lives. We may be quick to justify ourselves, our behaviors that are actually hurtful, or lead to what we selfishly want. We need to stand beneath Jesus on the cross, remembering that He died for us. We need forgiveness, and to be more forgiving. We need to root out the sin that remains. We need His grace again.

PP#17: Spider-Man - Responsibility and Hard Times

1. We are called to be heroic in hard times
2. Responsibility means serving others
3. Confronting Our Own Dark Side

With an image of Spider-Man

We are average people, with ordinary lives, with real struggles as we live day by day. We feel the calling by God to live into something great, to be great, to be extraordinary. But it is not easy. We cannot do it on our own. We rely on the power God gives us. Living heroically means living with responsibility. It means being heroic during hard times, serving others selfishlessly, and confronting our own dark sides. We have our new identity, the Holy Spirit equipping us, and the grace—that amazing grace—that transforms us into something more amazing than the Amazing Spider-Man!

Peter Parker chooses to take on the responsibility of his amazing power. That is our calling as well, to live heroically for Jesus.

Video Clip: Spider-Man (2002) Final Swing 1080p (HD)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6-BN5RTtCQ> (56 seconds)

25 seconds, then fade out when Spider-Man starts swinging

Closing Song - Sanctify

Announcement & Benediction - David

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR SEPT. 20, 2015

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

Sermon #2: “Amazing Spiderman: Responsibility and Hard Times”

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-10 and Luke 18:9-14

Opening prayer

Introductions:

Introduce yourself and share about a time you took up a hard responsibility and saw it through.

Context: Look at Galatians 5. What is going on, especially towards the end of the chapter?

Read: Galatians 6:1-10

1. Verse 1 - Why does Paul include a “watch yourself” when trying to restore others from sin?
2. Verse 2 - Share a time you missed carrying someone’s burdens, and you wished you had.
3. Verse 4 - What does it mean to test your own actions? How do you do this?
4. Verse 6 - What does this verse mean?
5. Verses 7-8 What does it look like to sow not to please your sinful nature but to please the Spirit?
6. Verse 9-10 Tell of a time God helped you to not grow weary in doing good.

Context: Look over all of Luke 18.

Read: Luke 18:9-14

7. In what ways can Christians act like the Pharisee?
8. Describe the Pharisee’s pride. What would help the Pharisee see his own pride?
9. Describe the tax collector’s humility. How do you foster this kind of humility?
10. Application: What will you take away from this passage? How will you live it out?