

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 #5: “Daredevil - Vengeance or Mercy?”

Scriptures: Romans 12:17-21, 1 Cor. 16:13-14

Sermon Text: Micah 6:8 “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

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

Theme: Justice and mercy, our own identity to live into both. Faith and fanaticism. Courage.

Wednesday Blurp: During the day, Matt Murdock is a lawyer who tirelessly strives as an advocate for justice by taking on cases no one else will. By night, he dons a red devil costume and fights as a vigilante against those who have escaped legal justice. In himself, Matt is torn between his own heroic ideals and his moral failures. People of faith are not always perfect pillars of virtue either. We are called to fight for justice and at the same time to show mercy. How do we authentically do both? Come this Sunday to struggle with this devil, if you dare!

Gathering Song

Welcome - Pastor David

Greeting Time - Pastor David

Worship Songs - Sanctify

Worship Prayer - Amanda

Kid’s Invited to Kid’s Church - Amanda

Missions Moment - Fall Craft Show and Luncheon

Prayer Time - Pastor David

Offering - “Doxology”

Video: Sermon Series Video

[Begin talking over the end of the video...] That’s you, in the cape! You’re a superhero! Did you know that? That’s a picture of you! You know we’re taking pictures for our new church directory. And all of you are going to look just like this!

PP#1: *Image of superheroes, with faces of church people put over their faces.*

I need some help up here! I’m going to ask our youth, or anyone else who wants a prize, to come up here on stage, and strike your most superhero pose. You’ve got to look the part!

[Have kids pose like superheroes, and then give them a Snickers - “You’re not you when you’re hungry!”]

We are all superheroes! Do you know who they are up here on the screen? Iron Man, top left? [Bob Rosenbaum] Invisible Girl, top right? [Angie Carter] Storm, bottom left? [Misty Thoen]. Wolverine, bottom right? [Andrew Bonsell]

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

I bet you don't feel like this very often, though! But when we give our lives to Jesus, He changes us, and makes us super! He gives us a new identity; we become part of God's family. He gives us the special power of the Holy Spirit, who fills us and lives within us, making us able to resist the temptations of sin and selfishness, and making us able to live God's way—in truth, justice, and the way of Jesus! He gives us the responsibility to do good, to fight against evil and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves. And we are sent into the world to make a difference, to make the world a better place. We are called to live heroic lives!

So, we're taking a few weeks to look at some superheroes from the comic world, placing them in dialogue with the Bible, to see what it looks like to live heroic lives, to see how we can live into the superheroes that God has made us to be.

PP#3: "Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith"

"Daredevil: Vengeance or Mercy?"

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" - Micah 6:8

Today we're taking a look at "Daredevil: The Man without Fear!"

"Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith." "Daredevil: Vengeance or Mercy?" Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

PP#4: *Various images of Daredevil: comic, cartoon, movie, etc.*

The scene is Hell's Kitchen, an area of Manhattan swarming with crime. By day, Matt Murdock fights against crime and corruption from within the justice system as a lawyer. He's a true hero, an advocate for the oppressed, taking on cases when no one else will. By night, however, Matt becomes another hero. He dons a red devil costume and hunts down criminals who have avoided or escaped the legal justice system.

Of all the long-time Marvel's superheroes, Daredevil's personal life is the most tumultuous and fraught with struggle. Over and over again Matt Murdock faces life's most drastic troubles. He's not a squeaky clean hero. He struggles to maintain his moral compass; the troubles he faces cause him to buckle and compromise. There are times he betrays his own heroic ideals and moral victories.

PP#5: *Last image of the opening video, subtitled,*

"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" -Micah 6:8

People of faith are not always perfect pillars of virtue, either. As superheroes we are called to fight for justice, but at the same time to show mercy. How can we do both of these with integrity? How can we not let our own desires cloud our judgement? How can we heroically live up to our calling in Micah 6:8 “To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

PP#6: *Blind Matt Murdock, either cartoon or live action.*

Matt Murdock’s struggles go back to his childhood. He is raised by his father, who is a boxer. He teaches his son, however, to never use violence to solve his problems. Instead, he is supposed to always fight with his mind. At school, Matt becomes teased for never fighting back. They think he’s a coward, a chicken. They start calling him Daredevil to mock him. But his father continues to tell him to not fear, but to have courage.

One day Matt sees a truck about to run over a blind man crossing the street. Matt pushes the man out of the way, but as the truck swerves, barrels of radioactive material spill everywhere. Some gets into Matt’s eyes, and cause him to go blind. Yet, mysteriously, at the same time, his other senses are heightened to an amazing level, and his mind is able to shape a picture of the environment around him, even hearing the heartbeats of people behind doors and walls.

PP#7: *Images of The Kingpin*

Well, unbeknownst to Matt, the crime lord known as The Kingpin controls Hell’s Kitchen, including his father’s boxing ring. He tells Matt’s father to throw a fight and go down. Matt comes to the fight, however, and when his father sees him, he stays in the ring and wins the match to show his son to never give up. The Kingpin is enraged, however, and Matt never sees his father again.

Matt then discovers that the truck illegally hauling the toxic materials through town, belonged to the Kingpin. He realizes that the Kingpin has taken away his eyesight, and his father. Matt wants revenge, and The Kingpin becomes Daredevil’s nemesis.

PP#8: *Image for the movie Daredevil.*

Now, movies have really made superheroes mainstream, and Daredevil got his own movie in 2003. Yet, it is a very mature, dark and graphic movie, so I really couldn’t find any appropriate clips to show in this setting. So—you’ll have to excuse me—but I’ve gone back to my childhood and found clips of the Saturday morning cartoons I used to watch. Here’s part of the origin clip for Daredevil from *Spiderman the Animated Series*, 1994.

Video Clip: Spiderman the Animated Series - DAREDEVIL ORIGIN [Part2] (1:17 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkuvRo0l00A>

I spoke with Nickie Coby a couple of years ago about this natural phenomenon of how for some blind people their other senses can become heightened. The brain accommodates. And Stan Lee drew upon that to create his second disabled superhero (the first was Professor X from last week).

PP#9: *Image of Matt Murdock as a lawyer and as Daredevil.*

So, after training with the mysterious Mr. Stix, Matt becomes a superhero who fights crime in Hell's Kitchen, donning the name he had been teased with as a child. But Matt's hidden identity as Daredevil is more than a secret like with other superheroes. For him, it becomes more of an alter ego. During the day Matt works within the legal system to bring criminals to justice. But at night, he dons an alternate identity and tracks down those who he was unable to bring to justice legally. During the day he plays by the rules, but when he puts on the costume, he no longer has to.

PP#10: Daredevil - Vengeance or Mercy?

1. Living heroically all the time

"Let your yes mean yes, and your no mean no. Anything more than this comes from the evil one." -Matthew 5:37

This sounds attractive, doesn't it? I mean, go and get those bad people who so smugly weasel their way out. Since they don't play by our rules, we'll play by theirs. The ends justifies the means. And for Matt Murdock, it feels good to be able to unleash all the pent up anger from when villains cheat the system. I think we can identify with this, and it seems attractive.

But this becomes a fundamental problem for Christians. You see, the Bible calls us to consistency. We are to be the same person all the time. Yes, we may behave differently in different situations, but we remain a godly person nevertheless. That means we don't let the situation control us, or dictate who we are. We are to have a super strength that helps us remain the same person.

You see, for Daredevil, he compartmentalizes his life. He would never use violence to bring justice as a lawyer, but as Daredevil, he dons a devil suit in order to terrorize his victims. He justifies behavior as Daredevil that he would never tolerate as Matt Murdock. And all the readers and viewers are caught into justifying it, liking it, too.

This is very dangerous. And we are all tempted to do it. We need to ask ourselves how we can have secret identities, or compartmentalized lives. When people from our different circles talk to each other, do they describe the same person? Are we kind and helpful and positive in one setting, but angry, crabby, or morally lax in another? Do we treat coworkers like we treat our friends? This affects our witness, you know. Are you the same person here on Sunday mornings as you are at work, after hours, on Tuesday? How about when you are at home, and then when you are traveling?

PP#11: *Image for fake online identity, like a computer user wearing a mask.*

Or, how about when you are on line? It is hugely popular to have on line identities. It's true for those who are gamers, but also for when we use social media. We hide ourselves behind alternate identities, and then we feel free to say and do and buy things we would never in person. We have a huge Daredevil problem in our culture. This is a lesson for how we are NOT to be...from the devil!

To be the hero God wants us to be, we need to remove the mask. We need to be who we are, no matter where we are, and no matter what happens. When we follow Christ, the Bible says, it is precisely when things are most difficult that we must remain in our God-given identity. And we have the super power of the Holy Spirit to make it possible. That's why we must turn to God during hard times. Only He can keep us centered and behaving as we should.

PP#12: Daredevil - Vengeance or Mercy?

1. Living heroically all the time

2. Justice *and* Mercy

“Don’t try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath. It is written, Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord.” -Romans 12:19

Frank Miller is most famous for his graphic novels like *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. But Frank Miller first developed his approach when writing for Daredevil. His approach is mature content, graphic, and pushes moral boundaries. At one point, Daredevil saves Bullseye, one of the Kingpin’s assassins, saying “society must make him pay the price...not me. I’m not God. I’m not the law. I’m not a murderer.” But then, when Bullseye kills Matt Murdoch’s lover, Daredevil hunts him down, beats him up, and then hangs him over the edge of a tall building. Shockingly, Frank Miller has Daredevil let go, letting Bullseye plunge to his death. This time Daredevil says, “You’ll kill no one, ever again!” Somehow, in a moral conundrum, Daredevil justifies killing the assassin. When he has been personally affected, then he is a vigilante murderer. The ends justify the means.

Much of the time, Daredevil walks a better moral path. He continues to reflect on the person he wants to be, and what he is pushed to do. He wants to remain heroic, but it has become popular to portray him crossing the line. In 2007 the comic run has Daredevil use torture on thugs to get information on an antidote for his dying wife. We see Daredevil reducing himself to the level of the criminals he battles. He loses his own identity, he loses himself and becomes something he doesn’t want to be.

Set your heroic standards before you face your struggles. Set your lines in place when you can think clearly and evaluate reasonably. Daredevil lives in a lot of regret for the decisions he made while in anger or stress. That’s the miserable consequence of dual identities!

How do we fight for justice while staying true to the call to be merciful? First and foremost, we must never fight God’s battle for God. We don’t have to defend God’s honor. God will. He will make all things right. We have to turn our sense of vengeance over to God, and ask God to deal with it. God sent Jesus to die on the cross to bring forgiveness. God doesn’t need His pound of flesh...He *gave* His pounds of flesh! God brings in mercy as an alternative, an alternative that, unlike revenge, actually does satisfy, and bring peace to the soul.

And Jesus here becomes our model. He bore the pain. We can’t take it. But we can give it to Jesus. We see this kind of mercy operating during the June AME Zion church shooting. The news showed the victim’s family members, broken, weeping, coughing out, “I forgive.” It wasn’t their strength. It was the Holy Spirit within them.

Paul writes about this in Romans 12. Here is a superhero passage. Are you ready for it?

PP#13: Romans 12:17-21 (CEB)

17 Don’t pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. 18 If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. 19 Don’t try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath. It is written, “‘Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back,’ says the Lord.” 20 Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head. 21 Don’t be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.

Verse 17, “Don’t pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good. If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. Don’t try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath. It is written, “‘Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back,’ says the Lord.” Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head. Don’t be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.”

Christians combine justice and mercy. Separating them is always bad. “Defeat evil with good.” That’s our super power! And it’s amazing because only that power has the ability not just to resolve the pain we feel inside, but also to transform our enemy. That’s the power of love! Remember 1 Corinthians 13? Of all the powers on earth, even faith and hope, love is the strongest! Jesus says to love our enemies! That doesn’t mean letting them off the hook, but it means loving them with justice and mercy. It is in how we treat our enemies that really shows our faith.

Daredevil can show us what this looks like, too. I’m going to take us back to the Saturday morning cartoons. Daredevil joins Spiderman and fights The Kingpin. But, of course, he escapes. But listen to the moral conviction Daredevil shows at the end of this clip.

Video Clip: Spiderman the Animated Series - Daredevil vs Kingpin (2:30 minutes)

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

The 2003 movie also ends on a stronger moral note for Daredevil. He finally gets to fight the Kingpin. Of course, he wins, and the Kingpin expects to be killed. But Daredevil refrains. He says he will leave The Kingpin to the law. As he walks away, he says, “Justice is served.” The Kingpin scoffs and says, “I’ll get out!” Daredevil simply says, “I know. And I’ll be waiting for you.”

PP#14: *Cover of Daredevil (vol. 2) #3 (January 1999)*

Interestingly, right from the beginning, Matt Murdoch has always been shown to be devout Roman Catholic. And often in good ways, it is his faith that serves as his moral compass when things get crazy. It helps him not give into his inner demon. When he follows his faith, it guides him rightly and gives him the strength to do what is good.

PP#15: Daredevil - Vengeance or Mercy?

1. Living heroically all the time

2. Justice *and* Mercy

3. Living courageously

“Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be brave, be strong. Everything should be done in love.”

-1 Corinthians 16:13-14

Daredevil gets a lot of things wrong, but one thing he does right is his courage to stand up for the little guy, the powerless, the victim. He is fearless in the courtroom, and as Daredevil, when pursuing injustice. And there are times it brings personal loss and pain to him. When the Sub-Mariner attacks New York, the army responds. Daredevil jumps in between them. He knows he is no match for him, but is willing to sacrifice himself to spare innocent lives. Same again when the Hulk is on one of his mindless rampages. Even though he knows he will be severely beaten, Daredevil fights the Hulk in order to slow him down just enough to save the city from great destruction. Daredevil becomes known as the man without fear because he is willing to even fight

battles that he knows he cannot win. Many times Daredevil does the hard—at great personal cost—just because it is the right thing to do. And in this way, this is a picture of Jesus!

We follow Jesus, and we imitate Jesus. We have the Holy Spirit within us to help us fight battles we know we cannot win, and fight them anyway. We leave the success in God's hands. Over and over again Daredevil realizes that he will never win the battle against crime in Hell's Kitchen. But over and over again he tries anyway. He has the courage and commitment to fight on and do what he can to do his part to make things better.

PP#16: *Image from Community Care yesterday.*

In this way, we can learn from Daredevil what it looks like to live heroically. We are called to fight battles too big for us. When we work towards eliminating world hunger, homelessness, or poverty, we realize we cannot fix it. It is easy to become discouraged when we put our hearts and souls into efforts and cannot see a clear victory on the horizon. We sent a group on Thursday to Feed My Starving Children. We packed 2,000 meals. But it is not enough. We gave out food yesterday to countless people in our parking lot. But it is not enough. We need to do it again this Saturday. And again. Even when we may not fully win a struggle, we need to have the courage and commitment to continue in our good work.

First Corinthians puts love and courage together: “Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be brave, be strong. Everything should be done in love.” Sometimes it takes a great deal of courage to love instead of hate. Courage can call us to stand for global issues, but it takes more courage to make changes in our personal lives. It takes courage to quit a job or leave a secure relationship, when they are unhealthy or keep us from growing deeper with God. It takes courage to stand up for others at work or school, or even to refuse to laugh at jokes that demean others, or to feed into gossip, or to overlook unethical practices.

We are called to be courageous people, people who live without fear enough to still do the right thing. We are superheroes. This is our picture, here. All the capes are invisible! This is what it looks like to live heroically. We do not give up. We have opportunities to live radically today, and tomorrow, and in the days ahead. It means all the time. It means justice AND mercy. It means being courageous. And when we struggle with evil, and it threatens to raise its ugly head again, we respond, “I know, and I’ll be waiting for you.”

Amen.

Closing Song - Sanctify

Announcement & Benediction - David

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OCT. 11, 2015

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

Sermon #5: “Daredevil - Vengeance or Mercy?”

Scriptures: Romans 12:17-21, 1 Cor. 16:13-14

Opening prayer

Introductions: Introduce yourself and share about a time you afraid to do the right thing, but you managed to do it anyway.

Context: Look at Romans 12. What is going on, especially the first 16 verses?

Read: Romans 12:17-21

1. Verse 17. Why should people follow this verse? What is the principle at play here?
2. Why is it so important for each of us to consider what other people believe is good?
3. Verse 18. This verse summarizes a lot of other verses. Yet, why do you think it is that it is not given as simple command, like the following verses?
4. Verse 19. What does it mean to leave room for God’s wrath? Why?
5. Verse 20. Do you think it is more satisfying to get revenge, or do good? Why?
6. What might it mean, do you think, to “pile burning coals of fire upon his head?”
7. Verse 21. A simple verse. Offer some advise on how to actually do it!

Read 1 Corinthians 16:13-14 (CEB)

8. Verse 13. Give an example of what it looks like to be folling this verse.
 9. Verse 14. What does Verse 14 mean?
- Read Micah 6:8.
10. What relationships do you see among the three things the Lord requires of us?

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