

## SUPER HEROES

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you."

Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."

Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here."

He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah. ----1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

I have always been a big fan of superheroes. When I was a kid I couldn't wait to get home to watch Superman on TV in black and white: "Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound!

Look, up in the sky! It's a bird! It's a plane! It's Superman!

Yes, it's Superman, strange visitor from another planet, who came to Earth with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men. Superman, who can change the course of mighty rivers, bend steel in his bare hands, and who, disguised as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper, fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice and the American way."

But you have to admit, Superman doesn't have much of a disguise. It's a cape! And he is rendered powerless when exposed to kryptonite, whatever that is.

All superheroes have flaws. The Hulk has anger management issues and can't hold down a job. Aquaman has an ugly costume and lame powers, but he'll do all right when global warming turns earth into a giant ocean. Robin is an orphan being bossed around by an eccentric billionaire, forced to fight crime wearing a cape and speedos. Batman suffers from paranoia and OCD, and his costume leaves him vulnerable to bullets, something villains usually have. The Green Lantern falls apart when exposed to anything yellow, which means he can be brought to his knees by a banana. Wolverine is another one with a bad temper, but his biggest weakness is that he is Canadian.

Israel had gotten itself into trouble under the leadership of King Saul. God wanted him deposed because he was dissatisfied with the king's behavior, so God enlists the Prophet Samuel to go and find a new king. It was Samuel who had chosen Saul years before because Saul was big, strong, good looking, and intelligent, but Saul had some huge superhero flaws. Samuel was afraid to do what God was asking, fearing that Saul might kill him for his betrayal. But Samuel had been listening and following God since he was a young boy, so he did as God asked. He went to Bethlehem on a secret mission.

With fattened heifer in tow, Samuel went to interview the sons of Jesse. Jesse brought with him seven sons, all tall, strong, square-jawed, hairy chested and

muscular. Each time Samuel laid eyes on these strapping studs, he assumed each was the one to be anointed, but each time God said no. Frustrated, Samuel said to Jesse “Is there anyone left?” to which Jesse sheepishly replied, “The youngest boy is out tending the herd.” Samuel said, “Well, bring him here.”

When David is brought in, his appearance is nothing like a king in Saul’s eyes. David is small and pretty, with a reddish type complexion and possibly a redhead. But God makes his intentions known to Samuel that David is to be the chosen king, and in secret David is anointed with oil.

Soon David would become the hero of Israel. A handsome young lad short in stature from an inconsequential town becomes the one who would take on the Philistine armies’ greatest warrior, the giant Goliath. In the classical epic tale, boy David goes one on one with the nine and a half foot giant who wore a bronze helmet, carried a giant spear-like javelin, and whose coat of armor weighed 125 pounds. David, unable to even stand up when dressed with armor, entered into the grand fight armed with a sling shot and five smooth stones. Goliath laughed and then was enraged, believing that the young lad was sent to mock him. With one whirl of his sling shot, Goliath was struck in the forehead and killed instantly. David’s stature grew strong that day, and the legend of the shepherd boy defeating Goliath spread throughout the land.

In time David would become the great king of Israel, winning more battles and securing the land for the Jewish people. Besides being recognized for his bravery, David was a great poet, a singer-song writer and musician best known for writing the 23 Psalm. But his flaws were numerous and would lead to a tumultuous life. Unsatisfied with his myriad of wives, he coveted a woman already married and seduced Bathsheba while her husband Uriah was out fighting battles for David. When the woman informed David that she was pregnant with his child, he had her husband murdered on the battlefield.

One of the problems in venerating superheroes like David is that we tend to not only overlook their flaws, but too often we replicate them. Many a Christian monarch looked to David, emulating his propensity for battle and bloodshed to conquer enemies. Kings, presidents, Popes, and world leaders have also allowed their sexual appetites to run amok like David.

Looking back at David we see a handsome boy full of charisma, wisdom, and bravery. He was the penultimate good shepherd, the first Renaissance man, a mighty king. And, his dark side would get the best of him. His sexual indiscretion would lead him to commit murder to cover up his madness, and one day it would come back to haunt him.

David's life was ripped and torn to shreds. Only in his confession, repentance and acceptance of responsibility was he able to experience life changing moment that moved him back into the creative orbit of God's intention. It takes maturity to acknowledge the truth about our lives, to confess our sins, to turn from that sin and live as God created us to live, and David eventually got there.

One thousand years after David, another king would come from Bethlehem, and his name was Jesus. He approached ordinary people and invited them to journey with him. He treated others, especially the outcast with compassion and open arms. He fed the hungry, forgave sinners, healed the sick, ministered to criminals, and challenged the oppressive regime that was mightier than Goliath.

Without a sword and without an army, the rabbi from Bethlehem was a threat to Rome, and thus he was crucified. Sealed in a tomb and defended by Roman guards, Jesus would overcome the powers of sin and death and rose to become the ultimate good shepherd, the flawless superhero.

Like David, God knows our hearts. God knows our every weakness, our darkest sides, and every sin we have ever committed. Yet in spite of our flaws, God calls us, inviting us to walk with Jesus to accomplish the same things he did. We are asked to feed the hungry, to provide shelter to the homeless, and to forgive others just as we have been forgiven. When we do the things that Jesus did, we become like superheroes, warts and all.

The fact is, God loves sinners, sinners like David, sinners like you and me, and God takes the brokenness of humanity and is assembling us together through Jesus Christ. No matter how serious our flaws may be, God loves us and desires to restore us to wholeness. This is the power of the cross that we are moving toward at Easter.