



God's Superpower is L.O.V.E.

Pastor John Klawiter

December 4, 2022

Second Sunday of Advent

Matthew 3:1-12

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

On Wednesday night, I gave the confirmation kids 2 minutes to name as many superheroes as they could.

They came up with quite a list—including some of the obvious ones like Superman and Spiderman, but also My Little Pony and of course... mothers (circle mothers).

Now, this would have been an impressive suggestion of a superhero if it came from one of the 7th or 8th graders who thoughtfully remembered all that their mothers did for them.

But... the answer was blurted out by a mother. Who was a guide.

It's ok, I still really liked the answer.

Then, I asked the students to name the superpower and the mission of their favorite superhero.

Many of them named Spiderman—whose mission is to help people.

Then, I asked them about God.

What is God's mission?

God's mission is to help people, too. God's all about love.

Then, I explained that the 10 commandments that we study are really God's way of teaching us. What's the most important commandment, I asked.

“Love thy neighbor.”

Great answer, I said... in fact, Jesus would later tell us how important this is, but it's not one of the 10 commandments.

I explained that one of the superheroes of the Old Testament, Moses, was given a mission. He brought the people out of slavery, out of Egypt. He brought the people—the descendants of Abraham—to salvation. They would never be slaves again.



Yet the people whined. They messed up. They didn't like the winding path and the journey through the wilderness. They didn't like spending a generation until finally reaching the promised land.

Thus Moses received the laws from God which he delivered to the people. These laws would dictate two important things. To love God. And to love each other.

The first three commandments are about how we love God.

You shall have no other Gods—this is #1. We don't take God's name in vain, or use it lightly. And we keep the Sabbath, we rest.

Each of these strengthens our relationship with God.

In order to do what?

Follow the other 7 laws which are about taking care of our neighbor. Love our neighbor.

Finally, after 40 years, they arrive in the promised land. But this doesn't mean that they're immune to conflict, to destruction, to future exile.

In fact, there's new hope—a hope for a Messiah who will come and save them.

Matthew knows his audience.

Retired Professor Stanley Saunders says that “Matthew's biblical quotations are meant as bright, flashing signs (CLICK AGAIN): “Pay attention, this is important!”

His audience was expected to know, and certainly DID know, both the quotations and the larger contexts from which they come. Matthew 3:3 (SLIDE of Matthew 3) links John with Isaiah 40:3, as well as with Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3. Isaiah envisions the preparation of a straight road upon which God returns to God's people, running from captivity in Babylon back across the desert to Judah.

Exodus 23:20 promises a “messenger” who will go before the people to guard them on the way to the land God has promised them.

Malachi 3 identifies a messenger who prepares the way for the Lord, who will come suddenly to his temple. All three portray the fulfillment of God's promises to the people, either of land or of return to land that had been lost, on the way to the restoration of God's true dwelling place, the temple that is heaven and earth as one. Used here in reference to John's ministry, Matthew 3:3 confirms that God is once more coming to redeem God's people.

John the Baptist is obviously foreshadowing the arrival of Jesus.



The great redeemer. The one who will make the crooked paths straight. Who will restore our relationship with God.

Yet John speaks of judgment. The current ways of complacency, greed, probably apathy towards each other, it's not cutting it.

He warns those who ride the coattails of Abraham that God is up to something bigger.

He says that ax is lying at the root of the tree (AX)—the root of the tree being an image of Jesse, the father of David, the greatest superhero of all.

All of this lineage, family trees, reliance on ancestors to secure their place in God's favor don't add up. John is calling for repentance.

What does that mean for us? As Christians, do we ever ride on the coattails of Jesus? Do we use Jesus, just like the Pharisees took for granted what Moses and Abraham did for them?

Yes, we are saved, but that doesn't give us permission to be a Christian in church and then walk all over each other at work or in the stores or online.

Repentance isn't one and done. Repentance is a weekly gathering in worship. It's a prayer of Thanksgiving to God before going to bed... and gratitude at the first breath in the morning.

Repentance is remembering what the mission is all about. It's about God's love. That's what Faith is all about, isn't it?

Where is our Joy as an act of resistance in this text?

I think it's simple. Through a pandemic and a subsequent period of inflation and economic uncertainty, our mission continues to be beyond ourselves. We never stopped asking, "God, where are you calling us to lead?"

I asked Jennifer Tolzmann, our council president through Covid, whose term will soon be complete, to share what she most appreciates about the work of Faith, especially through the lens of leadership.

VIDEO

You are the superheroes, Faith. And your superhero strengths are leadership, outreach, volunteering, and engagement.

Because our mission, like the mission of God, is, has, and always will be, to love. Amen.