

“Spiritual Heroes”

Matthew 16:21, 24-26, 17:1-9 & 2 Peter 1:16-19

Pastor James York

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Who is your hero? Do you like Superman, Wonder Women or have no fear Underdog is here. Perhaps your hero is an entire family like The Incredibles. In Spiderman, May tells Peter, “I believe there’s a hero in all of us, that keeps us honest, gives us strength and makes us noble.” Maybe you are fortunate to have a parent, teacher, coach, or relative as a hero, a person who brings out the best in you, nurtures your gifts and fills you with passion to shine with joyful love. A hero enables you to be the priceless, wonderful, magnificent person God created you to be. Who is your spiritual hero? Jesus is the ultimate hero.

Who is your everyday hero? Who is the wind beneath your wings that helps you fly higher than the eagle? Who helps you shine like the sun? Jesus has been showing the disciples how to be shining heroes. A lot has happened since Jesus called the disciples, to follow and fish for people. Jesus has been teaching, curing disease, making whole every brokenness, breaking every barrier, filling people with joy, mending relationships, uniting enemies in community and proclaiming the good news of God’s saving love.

Scripture proclaims Jesus as our saving, shining hero. **Matthew 17:1-9 NLT** “Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus’ appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter exclaimed, “Lord, it’s wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I’ll make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” But even as Peter spoke, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him.” The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground. Then Jesus came over and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” And when they looked up, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus. As they went back down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”

Jesus is the ultimate hero, sunlight pouring from his face, glory streaming from him, even his clothes were filled with light. Two great heroes of faith, Moses and Elijah, are talking with Jesus and worshiping him. Even nature echoes worship as a light radiant cloud enveloped them. God proclaims, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” The transfiguration of Jesus proves the divinity of Christ.

Our scripture begins with the phrase “six days later”. Matthew wants us to remember what preceded the transfiguration. For six days the disciples were pondering Jesus’ foretelling of his death and glorious resurrection and his teaching urging them to be heroes by being disciples. **Matthew 16:21, 24-26** “From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead. Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?””

Six days later Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up the mountain for the ultimate object lesson. There they see what Jesus will look like when he rises from the dead. They see the radiance and glory of God’s love that overcomes everything, even death. Jesus is our ultimate shining hero. Jesus extends the power to be a shining hero to the three and later the rest of the disciples and through the great commission to us. God’s final words are “listen to him” then Jesus extends God’s love to his disciples. The beloved embraced the disciples and said, “Get up and do not be afraid.” Do not be afraid of my radiance. Do not be afraid to shine like me. Do not be afraid in the dark days to come in Jerusalem for the radiance of my Spirit will sustain you. Do not be afraid in chaos, persecution, fighting and barrages of false stories. Do not be afraid to enjoy God’s love. Do not be afraid to cherish your status as a beloved child of God created for greatness. Do not be afraid to fulfill your calling. Do not be afraid to shine with radiant joyful love. Do not be afraid to be a hero. We are not to be afraid

to listen, follow, and shine like Jesus. We are not to be afraid to stand up to hate, division, and injustice. We are not to be afraid to help others, forgive, bring people together and spread joyful love everywhere.

Jesus is our ultimate hero, and he longs to unveil and inspire the hero in us. We are all created in the image of God. Theologian N. T. Wright explains that all of us have echoes of God imprinted in our being. One of those echoes is our desire for greatness, to be a hero. If you look at the most popular books, radio shows, comics, movies, and TV shows over time the most successful plot is to have a great hero with a grand task at hand. The allure of the story is measured by what dreams would potentially die if the hero does not succeed in the task and how the soon to be hero discovers his or her powers. A popular plot is a troubled, misunderstood person discovers their powers, finds their place in the cosmos, foils evil schemes and establishes a golden age of love. This sounds a lot like the gospel. Average and below average, sin filled, outcast, mistake-prone people discover they are forgiven, loved, and empowered by the ultimate power the Holy Spirit to love and bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. Each of us has the power to love someone into a relationship with God enabling them to become fully alive to shine with joyful love. Your love through them will transform others. You are a hero that is transforming the world. Hollywood's greatest superheroes have superhuman powers and the fate of the entire world rests on their shoulders. This sounds like Jesus. Jesus came to save the entire world, heal every person, right every wrong, make whole every brokenness, wipe away every tear and welcome us all into heaven for eternity.

Our fascination with heroes is echoing a God given desire of our soul. God has given each of us special gifts and abilities. Each of us has at least one gift that no other person in the world has ever had or will ever have and that gift is needed by the world. All of us are to share our gifts with love. All of us are designed to be heroes, to shine like Jesus, to become great by our loving service. The Transfiguration was God's way of awakening that desire in us, encouraging us, to shine like Jesus.

Hopefully you have experienced a utopia moment—a moment when all was well with your soul, a moment when you felt loved and eager to love, a moment when you felt an intimate friendship with Jesus. Spiritually we call these mountain top experiences. Peter had that moment and he wanted it to last. Suddenly everything fell into place for Peter; Jesus teachings and miracles made sense. Jesus is Messiah, the Anointed one. Jesus is God and my savior. Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Peter wanted to settle down and stay in that moment. God was using this as a teaching moment, to illumine him, to send the disciples back down into the world to shine with God's love and revelation. This is a common Old Testament experience. Moses, Elijah and other Old Testament heroes went up the mountain, experienced God then, shining with God's glory, came back down into the world to spread God's liberating word and love. Enjoy your mountain top experiences, learn from them, absorb the light, then come down and shine for those around you.

Peter wrote, **2 Peter 1:16-19 NLT** **"For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the powerful coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw his majestic splendor with our own eyes when Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father. The voice from the majestic glory of God said to Jesus, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." We ourselves heard that voice from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain. Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts."**

You are a hero when you shine with love and joy for the people in your everyday life. Delmer Chilton said, "Somehow, some people are always looking for something more, something electric and kinetic and spine tingling to happen to them religiously. Which is okay, those things do happen, sometimes, to some people. ... The truth of the matter is that religion is NOT about seeking after the extraordinary, not about the quest for the next new spiritual high, not about looking for an experiential fix of the Holy to carry one through another drab and ordinary week. NO! Religion is about seeing, and feeling and hearing and respecting the Holy in, with and under the ordinariness of our daily lives. To be religious is not a matter of being otherworldly; to be religious is to be uniquely grounded in this world, seeing the very stuff of life as the very stuff of God. Where are we to find the Holy? ... Well, you don't have to go to the mountaintop; it's all around you, all the time. We know this. It's shown to us in our sacraments. The water in the font, the water in which we baptize. It's ordinary water. It's the same water that goes into the drinking fountain, the same water that flushes the toilet. It's just water. What

makes it holy? The use makes it holy. We use it to baptize a child, we speak the promise of Christ, and with that water we bring a new child into Covenant with God and into Community with us. It's us and God together; God promising and acting and our believing and celebrating which reveals the Holy within the ordinary." In God's eyes, you are a holy superhero.

Maggie Oman prayed at the United Nations, "We join with the Earth and with each other. To bring new life to the land. To restore the waters. To refresh the air. To renew the forests. To care for the plants. To protect the creatures. To celebrate the seas. To rejoice in the sunlight. To sing the song of the stars. To recreate the human community. To promote justice and peace. To remember our children. We join with the Earth and with each other. We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery: for the healing of the Earth and the renewal of all life."

Each of us is constantly being transfigured by our journey with Jesus. Everyday God is eager to renew us, to help us shine with God's brilliant love. We celebrate Jesus' radiant resurrection whenever we celebrate life, love, joy, peace, and blessings. Our hero, Jesus, makes you a hero. God's light, love, and joy is flowing in you and through you to illumine your every darkness and to illumine the world.

That feeling that you are meant for something special, something great, to be a hero. It is coming from God – for you are someone special, you are God's beloved child, you sparkle with the very image of God. God designed you to shine like Jesus. God's desire is for you to bask in the radiance of God's light and shine.

You are God's shining hero. You are God's dearly loved child who brings God great joy. Amen