

**“How To Be a Hero”**

**Matthew 10: 40-42**

**June 29, 2008**

The other morning as I was getting ready for work, the Today Show was airing an interview with comic book author, and Marvel Comics founder, Stan Lee. A member of the Comic Book Hall of Fame, Lee is considered a legend in the field for having created some of the genre’s best-known characters including, Spiderman, Iron Man, The X-Men, The Fantastic Four, and the Hulk. In the interview, they were marveling (no pun intended) at the deluge of summer movie releases that featured super heroes. Within just a few short weeks, we have or will see films featuring Iron Man, the Hulk, Batman, Hancock, and the famous, fabulous Hellboy. And that’s not even to mention films like Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull, Speedracer, The Mummy- Tomb of the Dragon Emperor, and Kung Fu Panda, all of which might in some way considered to be super hero flicks. It seems that heroes are everywhere this summer. Why even right here at Quaker Hill Baptist Church you were all declared to be heroes this past week when WXMLM radio featured our congregation in a new promotion titled “*Hero of the Week*,” in which I was interviewed on air, and we were recognized for our work with Habitat for Humanity.

But back to Stan Lee’s interview on Today, when he was asked about what it was that made his characters so unique, Lee said that it wasn’t so much their super human qualities, is it was their more ordinary human traits that made his characters so special and beloved. When asked why he thought it was that people were so drawn to the more ordinary qualities of his extraordinary heroes, Lee answered that as best he could figure, the reason that folks were so drawn to the everyday nature of his heroes was that it gave them some hope that they too, being everyday people themselves, might possibly have some hope of also possessing some potential for heroic behavior as well.

And he’s right of course. In our heart of hearts, we all long to be given the opportunity to exhibit our hidden, but very real heroic nature. We watch films or read books about super heroes, war heroes, and other champions of freedom and justice down through the centuries and we long to walk a mile in their shoes. Which one of us wouldn’t, just for once, love to save the platoon, hit the winning home run, or rescue the pretty girl from the clutches of the evil villain? And that longing leads us to ask the question, “*What does it take to be a super hero?*”

I don't believe that I'd get any argument from you this morning if I were to say that if there one person who knows what it is to live a heroic life, it would be Jesus of Nazareth. No one person who has ever walked this earth as ever done as much good, saved as many lives, or brought as much radical transformation to the entire planet as did our Lord Jesus Christ. And in this passage from Matthew's Gospel that we read together just a few moments ago, we find his template for heroic living. In particular, I'd like to focus on one simple sentence that Jesus offered as instruction to his ancient disciples, that can also direct us toward the source of super human power that can change not just individual lives, but the entire world. And here it is, "*And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.*" Matthew 10: 42

In Jesus' words we discover that it's not always the big guy doing the big thing that makes the biggest difference in the world. But instead, Jesus offers 2 "little" ideas or ways of living that can change the world with super hero power. And the first is "*Love the little ones.*"

We've spoken so many times of Jesus' affinity for the folks that he sometimes referred to as "*the least of these.*" While most of the religious leaders of His day reveled in their wealth and power, choosing to hobnob with the most affluent and prestigious citizens of their day, Jesus chose instead to associate the lowly, the desperate, and the outcasts of society. Jesus avoided the leaders and hung with the lepers. Jesus shunned the politicians and offered grace to the prostitutes. Jesus said, "*And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.*" What he is saying here is that his true friends and followers will show love to the little ones of the world, and that when they do, then they are doing it to and for Jesus himself.

Author and pastor Max Lucado tells a story that brings this truth to light. He said, "*Some years ago, David Robinson, who plays basketball in San Antonio, visited our church. He's not a member of our church, but he shows up occasionally. You can imagine the stir that occurred when that seven-foot striking fellow walked into the auditorium. We have two worship services, and he came to the first one. At the end of it, people mobbed him. Kids all wanted his autograph. Dads lined up, allegedly to get things signed for their*

*kids, but we all knew the truth. The brouhaha finally settled down and David went his way, and we began the second service.*

*In the second service that day, I was standing to do the announcements when something happened that has never happened since. A homeless person walked in the back of the auditorium, came down the center aisle with his backpack, ratty jeans, torn T-shirt, unshaven face, and distinct odor. He walked down to the front, and he sat down.*

*The contrast struck me. When David Robinson entered, he was immediately swarmed. People wanted to touch him and be close to him, be next to him. However, I'm sad to say that nobody jumped up to run and sit next to the homeless man. After two or three awkward minutes during which I was trying to act like nothing was happening, one of our elders got up from his seat and sat by the man and touched him. I was struck. Wouldn't you have been as well?*

*The message that I received in my heart that morning was: Which of these men do you think touched Jesus? If you want to touch Jesus, whom do you touch? Jesus said, "Whatever you've done for the least of these, my brethren, you've done also to me."*

For Jesus, it is love shown to the little ones that makes one a hero. For not only is Christian heroism marked by love offered to the little ones, but also, Christian heroism is most often lived out when we do the little things.

We see the power of little things done for the little ones in Max Lucado's story of this elder in his church who changed any number of lives by simply sitting down next to a homeless man and touching him. He wasn't faster than a speeding locomotive, and he wasn't able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. (Well, at least as far as I know, he can't.) However, he was able to do something else, something much more powerful and heroic. He changed a life with the love of Christ.

And you can do the same. You might not have a secret identity or a spandex outfit. (Have you ever wondered why it is that the super hero's fabric of choice is spandex? Kinda weird, really.) At any rate, while you might not be able to fly around the world or smash through walls, you do have a power far greater than any character ever dreamed up by Stan Lee. You have the love of God. And when you put that love to work in the lives of others the

effects can be dramatic and far reaching.

As Madeline L'Engle once wrote, *“Perhaps what we are called to do may not seem like much. But consider what one scientist has called "the butterfly effect": even a butterfly moving its wings has an effect on galaxies thousands of light-years away.”*

Don't ever underestimate the world changing power of little things done for the little ones. The little things, a hand that is held, a hug that is given, a smile that is offered, a call that is made, a card that is sent, a meal that is cooked, a cup of cold water offered to a little one can change a life and the world forever.

Amen.