A.M.D.G. All Saints / Remembrance Sunday Text: Hebrews 11

 November 5th, 2017

**Hebrews 11 ….** Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith\* our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible. By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable\* sacrifice than Cain’s. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks …. By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.  By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised.\* Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’ …

By faith Moses was hidden by his parents for three months after his birth, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king’s edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh’s daughter. By faith he left Egypt, unafraid of the king’s anger; for he persevered as thoughhe saw him who is invisible.  By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.  Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.  Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.

**Hooray For Heroes!**

*"Faster than a speeding bullet!  More powerful than a locomotive! Able to leap tall buildings at a single bound!" It's Super Minister! – a stranger with powers and abilities far beyond those of mere mortals.” (adapted from opening lines to Superman prelude)*

I didn’t wear a Hallowe’en costume last Tuesday evening – but if I had, it might have been something like this. And I would have fit in well with all the other costumed superheroes that came to our door trick or treating. There were Spidermen, Supermen, Women Women, and Iron Men in abundance – a symbol perhaps, of a nostalgia and a yearning in our society these days. But of what?

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Superheroes have long been part of popular culture – going back as far as the ancient Greeks and their stories of demi-gods like Hercules and Achilles. In the Middle Ages, Germanic audiences cheered in the mead halls – pounding their beer steins on the table as Beowulf slayed Grendel. Frodo saved Middle-Earth in the ‘*Lord Of The Rings’* trilogy and Luke Skywalker used the force to battle Darth Vader and the Empire.

These tales are pervasive through the centuries. No matter what culture you come from, we all love a good hero. Watching the good guy – or gal, as it may be – never gets repetitive or stale. We are always drawn to a hero who achieves great deeds on behalf of the group, tribe, or civilization. Certainly in recent years in North America, there has been a surge in the ‘superhero’ genre in books, movies and TV.

Social psychologists tells us that superheroes serve a valuable function. Part of it is pure escapism. With so much going on in the world – acts of terrorism at home and abroad, mass movement and migration, widespread poverty and famine, increased violence in all its forms, global climate change – superheroes provide us with a utopian script for life. ***We*** may not be able to control what’s going on in the world. But rest assured – Batman or Wonder Woman can – and will!

And even on a smaller, more personal level – I think that deep down, in that little corner of our minds that only we have access to – don’t we all wish at times that someone else would steer the automobile called your life? Even for a day – an hour – a few minutes? What if Superman could swoop in and pull you out of rush hour traffic when you’re late for work or an appointment? Or Wonder Woman stand up for you when you feel you are being unfairly treated?

And for anyone who has felt vulnerable, weak, powerless, bullied or ignored in some way – superheroes provide inspiration and hope that things will get better – that justice and peace will prevail – that good will overcome evil. In other words, they are symbols of empowerment, hope and encouragement.

Even taking it out of the realm of the fantastical, we still look for heroes in our daily lives as well. For some, firefighters and police play that role – protecting the public from disaster and what is dangerous – often at great risk to themselves. And on this Remembrance Sunday, we honour as heroes those in the Armed Forces, who protect our country and work for justice around the globe. And we remember those who gave their lives in past conflicts so that there might be peace in the world. These are ordinary people – people like you and me – working for the common good and seeking to be part of making our world a better place.

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Our Scripture today from the book of Hebrews in the New Testament gives us a list of heroes in the faith. Not mythical superheroes – but ordinary people who did great things for God: Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Rahab, David and the prophets. The writer of Hebrews tells us that, through their faith “*they captured kingdoms, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, won strength out of weakness, and put foreign armies to flight.*” *(vss 33-34)* Ordinary people doing extraordinary things because of their faith.

But lest we put these biblical heroes on a pedestal – let us also remember that they had their flaws as well. Abraham, at one point, gave his wife Sarah to a foreign king to save his own skin, and Sarah, out of jealousy and spite, sent her handmaid and son, Hagar and Ishmael, to perish in the wilderness. Moses killed a man, and when called by God to lead the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt – gave all sorts of excuses, and asked God to please send someone else! Our list of heroes from scripture today also includes Rahab, who was a prostitute, and David, who committed adultery. The extraordinary thing about these ‘heroes’ in the faith is that God was able to use them, despite their flaws, to achieve something good.

And that is what gives me hope. That God can take each of us – flaws and all – and use us to bring justice, and hope, and peace, and love in our little corner of the world. We may not be superheroes, but we can be God’s heroes – or using a biblical term, God’s ‘saints’ – flawed through we might be – but still chosen, beloved and faithful people through whom the light of God can still shine.

On this Remembrance Sunday, I invite you to close your eyes and take a moment in silence to remember heroes and saints in your own life – people who have inspired you by their faithful witness; encouraged you to see the beauty God created in you; gave you hope to carry on when you wondered if you could; loved you beyond your flaws even when you couldn’t love yourself; and helped you to become who you are today ………

**Prayer**: Thank You, God, that we are surrounded by this cloud of faithful witnesses – saints of God and heroes in our lives, who have made a difference because of their love, their encouragement, their example, their faith. As our scripture reminds us today: “*Through their faith, they still speak.*” Help us also to hear the call on our own lives to be Your saints – people in whom the light of Your love shines brightly – even through our flaws. We pray this in Jesus’ name, who is our example and our hope. Amen