

Superman's Song

June 12, 2016 – Confirmation Sunday

By Rev. Dr. John Suk

In the children's picture book, *Where the Wild Things Are*, Max makes mischief. He hammers nails into his bedroom wall. He chases a dog with a fork. When his mother shouts, "Wild Thing," Max answers back, "I'll eat you up!" And so Mom sends Max to bed, without supper.

Alone in his room, Max dreams a magical world, and sails over a year and in and out of weeks and through a day to where the Wild Things live. They roar their terrible roars and gnash their terrible teeth. But Max stars into the Wild Thing's yellow eyes without blinking once. He has a spiritual power over them, and thus tames the Wild Things. They even make Max their king. At which point Max cries, "Let the wild rumpus start!"

The rumpus is fun, for a while. But soon Max is rumpussed out and so he sends the Wild Things off to bed. By himself, now, Max is lonely. But, "Then, all around, from far away, across the world, he smelled good things to eat, so he gave up being king of where the Wild Things are, and Max sailed back, over a year and in and out of weeks into the night of his very own bedroom, where he woke to find his supper waiting for him, and it was still hot."

What brought Max back? Well, from all around but far away he "smelled good things to eat." The aroma of hot food, just a hint of what was sitting on his night table, woke Max up to what really mattered—not just food, but his mother's love.

In fact, if you are alert and pay attention, you will soon realize that all nature sings and round us ring these little hints about what really matters. Sometimes the hints are pleasant. If you step out of your cottage into the mist early on a Sunday morning, and hear a loon sing, you will probably think nature is holy.

Other hints about what really matters are warning shots. For example, when your friend stops talking for days on end, and he can't lift his head off his desk, and is cutting himself, you think "depression," worry about suicide and so you talk, or perhaps even insist on getting him help.

Popular culture—things like movies and music and gaming—popular culture, like Max's meal, is also full of hints about what really matters. Movies, from all around, in particular, often have the aroma of spirituality about them, and suggest that whatever you think or even if you never think of it at all, spirituality is important.

In the 2006 *Superman Returns* movie, for example, Jor-El, Superman's father, echoing the Bible, says of his newborn baby, "Even though you've been raised as a human being you're not one of them. [These humans] can be a great people, Kal-El. They wish to be. They only lack the light to show the way. For this reason above all—their capacity for good—I have sent them you, my only son." Or, as Isaiah put it: "for a child has been born to us, a son given to us, and he is named wonderful, counselor, prince of peace."

More recently, in 2013's *Man of Steel*, Jor-El says, "He—Superman—will be like a god to them." Superman himself says that the "S" on his costume stands for hope—the light that Isaiah says the people walking in darkness need if they are going to burn the boots of tramping warriors and their garments full of blood. In all the Superman movies, the Kryptonian names—Jor-El, Kal-El—include the Hebrew word "El," for "God," not surprising, since the artists who invented Superman were both Jewish.

The Superman movies use spirituality, in part, to give their stories a depth that they might otherwise not have as violent action movies. In doing so, these movies suggest that Hollywood knows something most of us often forget. Hollywood knows that people are, in fact, whether we realize it or not, deeply spiritual, and that we will reward movie makers with billions of dollars and adulation and sometimes even Oscars if these movie makers can make their movie characters' spirituality resonate with our spirituality.

Hollywood movies are full of this spiritual stuff even though Hollywood knows that we often don't realize that we're spiritual, if we don't think about it much. These movies, in a way, prey on the deeply felt spiritual longings we all have, resonate with them even when we don't recognize those longings, to make us paying fans. The *Crash Test Dummies* song that *Pancake Lunch* sang gets this and pokes fun at our fascination with Superheroes.

The song is about Superman's, "Supe's" funeral, in a church. We learn that in the end, Supe never made any money, he had the strength but he would not, and he was tempted just to quit and join Tarzan in the forest. The funeral is attended by other aging Superheroes. Wonder Woman is overweight and has a double chin. Flash slouches to his seat, shuffling slowly on his feet, old and bent. The Justice League is long past its prime, not so heroic anymore. None of them really had lasting answers, spiritual or otherwise, and now it is all over.

Still, whatever we think of popular culture's fascination with a spirituality that many in our society no longer recognize in themselves, Hollywood is onto something important with its aroma, its hints of spirituality. We are, in fact, all spiritual beings. We all, like Max, dream cosmic dreams; we all ache for something deeper and more precious than good grades, a new phone, and pizza. In the end, we don't just want to hear a loon, we want to be one with the loon and all of nature; we don't just want to just help someone in need, we want to be a friend, maybe even someone who can share the load, a saviour. We dream of light overcoming the darkness, of coming to the light, and, like Max with the Wild Things, or especially Max's mother for Max himself—we dream of being light. We are all deeply spiritual—the question is, are you

willing, do you dare, plumb those depths? Will you get beyond the movies playing with your spirituality, and explore your own deep, best spirituality side, inside, seriously?

Look, today is Confirmation Day. I'd like to see all seven of you stay active in church for your whole lives. God knows, we could use your enthusiasm, joy, insight and spirituality here. I mean that with all my heart and soul. Today is not a graduation day, it is a joining day.

But whether you stay active or not, what matters most is that you don't lose sight of that spirituality wafting about deep inside of you. Name it. Embrace it. And live it as light, the way Jesus showed us how, two thousand years ago—long before Hollywood was even a dream.