

Children's Moment *Heroes for Today*

We all like to watch TV programs and play games and we see heroes there, like Captain America, Supergirl, the Flash and others.

What do you like about them?

There are real-life heroes. They are more important than the movie and cartoon characters we watch. They're men and women who serve in the military, police officers, fire department, doctors, nurses and teachers, and all sorts of other people who are special, who sacrifice for us and others without making a big deal about it.

Who's your hero? Mom or Dad, Uncle or Aunt, Grandma or Grandpa are good heroes.

God helps us to have courage even when we're afraid. That's how we can all trust God and do the right thing, even when it's hard or scary. That's what makes a hero.

Jesus is our hero. Let's be one, too.

Message: A Hero for Today

Have you ever heard of The Dorchester?

“It was a troop transport ship that Lieutenants George Fox, Alexander Goode, John Washington, and Clark Poling were stationed aboard on February 1943. The four were chaplains of varying faiths. Lt. Fox was Methodist, Lt. Goode was Jewish, Lt. Washington a Roman Catholic, and Lt. Poling a Dutch Reformed clergy.

The ship was struck by a submarine’s torpedo at about 1:00 am on February 3rd and sank into icy Atlantic water in twenty minutes. Immediately after the explosion, the chaplains quickly rallied together and began handing out life jackets, and directing people to safety. They didn’t ask who was Jewish, Christian, believer or non-believer. They just helped the next person in line.

When the life jackets ran out, their courage and valor was demonstrated. All four men selflessly gave away their own life jackets. Then they circulated, praying with some and encouraging others. It’s hard to say how many lives the men actually saved. Of the 902 men on board, 672 died with 230 survivors.

As the ship went down, survivors in nearby rafts could see the four chaplains - arms linked and braced against the slanting deck. Their voices could be heard offering prayers.

That night Reverend Fox, Rabbi Goode, Reverend Poling and Father Washington passed life’s ultimate test. In doing so, they became an enduring example of extraordinary faith, courage and selflessness.”¹

There’s a Swahili expression: Panap nia, njia hupatikana.

It means, “Where there is hope, there is a way.” There is hope in faith and the courage to act when others are in need.

People do courageous things every day, all around us.

But there are those times when something special happens. We know it when we hear about it or see it. It makes an impression on our heart and mind that stays with us, individually and collectively. These extraordinary actions are a blessing. We pass the narrative down, from

¹ <http://www.fourchaplains.org/the-saga-of-the-four-chaplains/>

generation to generation, so it can encourage and inspire others. That’s how we pass blessings on.

So, what does it mean to give your life for another person?

Acts of courage and self-sacrifice are uncommon in nature.

I believe they happen more often than we realize. There are two reasons I think this is true. First, these acts of courage are evidence the lesson the apostle John taught is true, *“This is how we know love: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters”* (1 John 3:16 CEB). Second is what the Holy Spirit affirms for all of Jesus’ followers, *“This is the covenant that I will make with them. After these days, says the Lord, I will place my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds”* (Hebrews 10:16).

What these two verses tell me is this: God’s relationship is special.

By grace, God gives us a gift. It’s the gift of knowing right from wrong, generosity from scarcity, love from hate, passion from apathy. God gave us a conscience so when we’re called to react and respond, we have the means to do so. For some of us, our conscience is well fed, versed in the goodness of prayer, God’s Word and the grace we share when we’re gathered with others in faith. We can be with our family, at church or with a group of men and women on sea, land and air, locally or at other places across the world.

Even better, we have an example: Jesus.

Jesus willingly sacrificed his life so that we could have a very special life. The life Jesus wants for each of us to have goes beyond the limits and boundaries of our every day existence. The life Jesus wants us to have is filled with the presence, power and prompting of God’s own Spirit. If we say “yes” to the prompting of the Spirit, responding wholeheartedly and without reservation, seeking to show God’s love for another person without thinking about ourselves or our reward, that’s what it means to be a follower of Christ. For those watching from the sidelines, we’ll be a hero for today.

That’s the kind of heroism Wesley Autrey showed in New York City in 2007. “Wesley was standing on a subway platform when he saw a man nearby have a seizure. The man collapsed and fell onto the tracks as a train was coming. ‘I had to make a split decision,’ says Wesley.

What he did was amazing. Leaving his two young daughters standing on the platform, Wesley jumped down in front of the train and laid on top of the man, holding him down. The train passed over them, but both men came out of it without injury. When asked later why he risked his life for a stranger, Wesley replied, ‘I did what I felt was right.’”²

Heroes aren’t people who help others because they feel distress or because they’re uncomfortable with a situation. That’s particularly true when our acts of generosity come with a high cost to ourselves.

It turns out heroes have heart.³

Those who sacrifice themselves for others are strongly motivated by compassion for others. When we feel empathy for others, when our heart is moved, that’s when we’re more likely to act. And, if the person or persons suffering continue to suffer, heroes are more like to act again, even more deeply. When we serve God and others with generous hearts, reaching out to those in need with compassion, we’re following the guidelines God wrote on our heart and mind. Our body is catching up!

When we seek glory for ourselves, we aren’t a hero. When we seek glory for others, we’re good but we aren’t a hero. When we seek glory for God, we’re a hero. When we seek glory for God and we intentionally do it over and over, we become a hero who transcends the physical limits of this world. Reverend Fox, Rabbi Goode, Reverend Poling and Father Washington passed that ultimate test. They knew what their choice meant. They did it anyway and offered comfort to others with their last thoughts and words.

How? There’s a clue in Luke 24:45-47. Jesus opened the disciples’ minds so they could understand the scriptures. He said, “*This is what is written: the Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and a change of heart and life for the forgiveness of sins must be*

² Josh Elmore, *Why People Make Sacrifices for Others, Greater Good, April 29, 2015*

³ *Ibid*

preached in my name." Jesus tells us why Easter happened. Jesus modeled humility, grace and self-sacrifice for us on Calvary. To be his followers, we need to imitate Jesus' way of living, modeling it in today's culture.

The key words are "a change of heart and life."

We have to change. That's not easy. Turn your life over to God. There's a freedom and liberty that comes into your life when you do. That's because you no longer rely on your strength, but God's power.

We can live extraordinary lives. On Memorial Day, we retell stories of people whose lives inspire and encourage us. Most of us will never be on a battlefield. Most of us will never be called to go into a burning house. Most of us will never be in the line of duty, serving and protecting people from violence and crime. We give thanks for those who do serve and care for others. But God made us all to be extraordinary where we are.

We all can live lives of quiet courage, faith and generosity where we are. Some of us are called to do that as we care for children and teenagers. Some of us are called to do that as we care for elderly parents, family members and friends. We're all called to do that in our relationships, particularly with our spouse. And we're called to help those in need – the poor, orphaned, widowed, stranger and alien.

We can't do it alone. We're good, but not that good. And, when we're faced with a choice that comes with a high cost, we need that extra prompting at the right time. Trust God. Believe in Jesus. Listen to the Holy Spirit. If you do, you'll be given the strength and courage to act on your faith in any situation. Do that and you'll be a hero for today.

Let us pray:

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be today. Take away the desires that shouldn't be there, and help me be single-minded in my focus and my pursuit of you. Help me to follow you and be transformed by your love so I may serve others with that same love. Help us to give myself to other in faith and hope so they will know your love. We commit ourselves to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Luke 24:44-53 (NRSV)

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you - that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.