**August 14, 2022 Hebrews 11:29-12:2**

 ***We Need a Hero***

**Scripture:** Hebrews 11:32-12:6 NRSV

*(32)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-- (33)who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, (34)quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (35)Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. (36)Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37)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-- (38)of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. (39)Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40)since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. (12:1)Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, (2)looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

**Notes:**

1. ***Heroes*** remind us of what we might be capable of.
	1. A ***hero***, is someone who achieves beyond the average.
	2. Society needs ***role*** ***models*** to look up to and emulate.
	3. Heroes, model our ideals and shape our ***goals***.
	4. There is one hero whom we look to, ***Jesus***.
2. His way represents a ***real*** ***possibility*** for us all.
	1. We have failed to make him ***attractive*** and ***captivating***.
	2. Jesus ***invites*** us to imagine ourselves becoming like him.
3. Who are the ***saints***?
	1. ***Saints*** are those who makes Christ real and relevant.
	2. ***Saints*** are the people the light shines through.
4. You need ***heroes***, you can listen to and admire.
	1. Heroes as ***models***. Heroes as ***motivation***. Heroes as ***inspiration***.
	2. Reach for a life that is ***Christlike***.
	3. ***Heroes*** are there to be found if you look for them.
	4. Someone is looking to you for ***guidance*** and ***motivation***;
5. Who are your ***heroes***?
	1. Who has ***inspired*** you?
	2. Who have you watched live a life of ***consistent*** ***faith***?
	3. Are you living a life of ***consistent*** ***faith***?
6. We need more heroes; especially heroes of the ***faith***.
	1. Each of us has the ***potential*** to be a hero to somebody.
	2. Our ***goal***; to be found ***worthy*** of being a role model, just as Christ has been a role model to us.

*“Therefore, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking above all to Jesus, author and finisher of our faith.”*

**Script:**

We need a hero. If you look back through time we hear about all kinds of heroes; people like Richard the Lion Hearted, Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, FDR, Ike, Patton, JFK, Martin Luther King. People who stepped out of the shadows and into the light, to do what they saw as the right thing to do. People who were larger than life, people whose stories have stood the test of time, people who have inspired the hearts of young and old, affecting the pages of history.

But, look about the landscape, who are the heroes of our day? For many we have to go back to Donald Trump, to see somebody that we admired and looked to as a hero. If we look back to this country when it was first taking shape, the colonies consisted of roughly 3 million people, and it produced people with names like Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Adams, and many others. Today, we have nearly 327 million people and I struggle today to identify one person that I would consider a hero.

The absence of heroes may say more about us than it does about their scarcity. There is a consensus across the land which goes far beyond our founding fathers desire for equality before the law. Today’s consensus insists we should all be seen as essentially equal in virtue, courage, accomplishment, enterprise. It involves a kind of leveling down which lifts those who are less than ordinary to be equal with those who are extraordinary.

Many in our culture desire to see the heroes fall, in our movies, in our sporting events; many times, we wait and watch to see the hero fall. Why is it that we wait to see the hero fall? Why will we almost instinctively assume the worst motives in the politician? Why are businessmen regarded cynically as nothing but greedy? Why are all the pretenders, to noble motives or sacrifice, immediately called into question? Why all this cynicism, inability to idealize, to hold others on a pedestal?

In our passage today, we hear about those who are considered the heroes of the faith. People who have stood for what was right, even in overwhelming odds, and they are recognized for their obedience and perseverance in the face of these obstacles. Stand with me as we share in the reading of Hebrews 11:32-12:2

*Hebrews 11:32-12:2 NRSV (32)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-- (33)who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, (34)quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (35)Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. (36)Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37)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-- (38)of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. (39)Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40)since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. (12:1)Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, (2)looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

SO I ask again, “Why all this cynicism; why this inability to idealize, to hold others on a pedestal?” The answer may not be that there are no more men like Lincoln Washington, Jefferson, Eisenhower, or Kennedy. It may be that in our self-indulgent, consumer and pleasure oriented society, heroes are uncomfortable people to have around. They remind us of what we might be capable of. A hero, by definition, is someone who achieves beyond the average, who stretches beyond the normal. A hero is someone who suggests by his very existence that I have not become all I could be. In many ways we may be an age that does not want to be stretched, driven to new heights of challenge, adventure and conquest.

In any event, the result is that many of us no longer have heroes, especially the young people who need them most. In a recent survey of high school students, the most popular response to the question: “Who is your hero?” was “None.” Those who did answer wrote mainly of rock stars and celebrities. World Almanac polled 2,000 eighth graders to learn which people they most admired and wanted to be like. The students referred basically to movie stars and rock artists. Although half those polled were girls, only five women were on the list — all actresses, models or pop singers. There was not a single name on the list who was not an entertainer or a sports figure. Not a statesman. Not a scientist. Not an author. Not an architect, physician, lawyer or even an astronaut. Societies need role models more than anything else. They need people they can look up to and emulate. A nation that does not reward and respect real accomplishments … is weakening its own moral fiber and preparing for its own collapse.”

Which leads us to “why” heroes are important. We require heroes, models who exemplify our ideals and shape our goals. A major dimension of our development as real human beings involves not only internalization of moral principles, development of a conscience which orders and restrains our impulses. It involves not only convictions about the “Thou shalt nots,” in life. It also involves deep feelings about what we can become, the internalization of a captivating vision of what kind of person we should seek to be, a vision strong and solid enough to last for a life-time. Freud called it the need for an ego ideal. We need to idealize captivating figures or we lose a sense of identity, hope and direction for our own lives.

For Christians there is one hero whom we look to and idealize above all others, who represents a vision of what we may be and should long to become, whose person should fascinate and captivate amidst all the trials and troubles of life. It is Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and Joseph, citizen of first century Palestine. Try telling the crowd at the cocktail party that Jesus is your hero. In this old story that is what he is. He comes to us as a real human being who we are to admire, to emulate, to follow, struggle to be like, whose mind and spirit we are to covet, whose life is to be the model for our lives.

“Come, follow me,” he said to the wise and simple of his time. “You will do greater deeds than I have done,” he said to his friends the night before he died. “Have this same mind, attitude, spirit in you which was in him,” writes the Apostle Paul to Corinth. “Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection…” writes the author of the Letter to the Hebrews.

Is Jesus even remotely a hero in these early days of the 21st Century? Do we live grounded in our admiration of him and his way, determined before we die to come as close as we can to his mind and spirit? I wonder.

It seems that for many he has become a kind of supernatural figure of marvelous powers and divine beneficence who at the same time bears no relationship to life in this real world. It never occurs to many that his way of dealing with the hurts and trials of this very human life, his spirit and attitude as he relates to others, his courage and hope in the face of an uncertain and unknown future, represents a real possibility for us all as we seek his way, his truth, his life. Somehow we have failed to make him real, attractive and captivating to the intelligent mature involved adult of our day, not to mention the young whose surroundings are so devoid of heroic figures. With every new generation, we need, as the apostle Paul puts it, to learn Jesus. Jesus as the hero who invites us to imagine ourselves becoming like him.

The hero is a model of real life. Of course, one way Christians down through time have gotten close to him and his vision is by getting close to more contemporary figures who have managed by the grace of God to live out that vision in a major way in their time. That is why the Roman Catholic tradition has paid so much attention to the saints of the church.

Who are the saints? The saints are anyone in whom we sense the presence of the spirit of Jesus, anyone who makes Christ real and relevant to our lives. I have my own collection who are my life blood. Men like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, John F Kennedy; Athletes like Roberto Clemente, Manny Sanfguilen; many who have been mentors and friends in my life; people like Rev. Marshall Brown, Homer Brown, Pappy Seese, Granny McCreary, and those who are still around today like my dad, and Ray Carson. I try to listen to their words of advice. I try to remember those who have passed on. You see, I am able to see Jesus in and through them. They help me to keep my eyes on Jesus. A man named Earl Marlatt published a book, Protestant Saints. While he was writing, his six-year-old nephew asked him, “Uncle Earl, what’s your book about?” Uncle Earl hesitated a moment before he answered: “I’m afraid, Phil, it’s about something you never heard of —saints. Do you know what saints are?” Little Phil’s eyes lit up, as if he were remembering a room of stained-glass windows at Sunday School. “Sure,” he said. “I know what saints are. They’re the people the light shines through.” Indeed they are. So look around. You need your collection of saints, heroes, whom you can listen to and admire again and again, remember when life gets rough, look to as models of what you may be.

That’s what my saints do for me. Let the light of Jesus shine through into my heart and life. Heroes as models. Heroes as motivation. Heroes as inspiration. We draw strength and life from them. By their lives they say to us, “You can do it, too. You can rise above the common, the ordinary and reach for a life that is rich and noble and Christlike. You can. You too can be a hero.”

Earlier I said that heroes have disappeared from our culture today. Well, that is not quite true. They may not be there in the headlines or on the world stage anymore. But they are there to be found if you look for them. You may even be one of them. Ever occur to you that someone is looking to you for guidance and inspiration, model and motivation; looking to you to lift and encourage, guide and inspire by your quiet leadership, your gentle hope, your patient ways?

A teacher asked her class of fifth graders to write about their personal heroes. One little girl brought her essay home and showed it to her parents. Her father was flattered to discover that his daughter had chosen him. “Why did you pick me?” he asked proudly. “Because I couldn’t spell DeCaprio,” the little girl replied.

Daniel Inouye writes of his father, “Throughout history, people have shown a craving for heroes who are larger than life, grand giants. My heroes are people you’ve never heard of. My father was my hero. He worked two jobs all his adult life, until he had his heart attack. His reward was to see his four children go to college, something that was denied him. You can repeat that story thousands of times throughout the United States. This is still a country of heroes. When I left home to join the Army during World War II, I was 18 years old. My uniform did not fit right. I was not glamorous at all. He was riding with me on a streetcar — we didn’t have a car of our own. He didn’t say much. Finally, he turned to me and said, ‘This country has been good to us. It has given us a good life. So be it. Whatever you do, do not lose your faith and do not dishonor your family.’ It took him less than two minutes to say that to me, but it said more than a book. And I have lived off that ever since.”

Dr. Deborah Hyde-Rowan, a neurosurgeon, writes, “My grandmother has been my hero, the most influential person in my life. I cannot think of her without a swell of pride at my heritage. Articulate and dynamic, she was a leader in our church and community. I am convinced that had opportunities for furthering her education been available, she would have been a powerful force in our society. Fortunately for me, she was not only my mentor, but my best friend. She constantly told me I was somebody and could be or do anything on this earth if I would study hard and keep my faith in God. And more than once she took me aside and said, ‘Please remember your roots and be proud of them.'”

Who are your heroes? Who is it that has inspired you to do more than you have ever imagined? Who has demonstrated how to face adversity and keep moving forward? Who have you watched as they lived a life of faith and consistency? Thank them if you are able. Likewise, are you living your life in a manner that others will look to you as their hero? Are you living a life of consistent faith? Are you demonstrating Christ to others?

We need more heroes; especially heroes of the faith, modern day heroes. Each of us has the need for a hero, but likewise, each of us has the potential to be a hero to somebody else. Our goal should be to be found worthy of being a role model for another just as Christ has been a role model for us. *“Therefore, seeing we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that weighs us down and the sin that clings, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking above all to Jesus, author and finisher of our faith.”*