

Rev Nancy Wakely - July 12th, 2015

Everyone loves a hero. A plain everyday hero is okay but we seem to be enamored with super heroes.

When I was a kid, you could go to almost any drugstore and find one of those revolving racks of comic books. It wasn't cool just to stand there and look at them all. Your best bet was to find a place at the soda fountain and place an order. Some days, you could only afford a five cent soda, so you didn't bring as many comics to the counter to thumb through. But on the days you could order a coke float, or a sundae, or even a burger, well, that entitled you to a long stay at the counter with as many comic books as you could get through in a reasonable amount of time.

My brother always went for the super hero comics but my favorite was Little Lulu. Now she was a quiet hero and did her best work when she was telling stories to her little friend Alvin. She showed him the way little by little and one story at a time. Any self-respecting “whammo-blammo” superhero would have been doubtful of her abilities. Not me! I had faith that Little Lulu would sort things out in the end.

John the Baptist was the super hero of his time. Nothing about him was commonplace. He ranted and raved and scavenged food in the wild. John was kind of “whammo-blammo” guy and he never pulled punches. At a time when the Jewish people had been bullied around years, it seemed that he came to save the day and to proclaim God's kingdom and the coming of Jesus and the establishment of long-awaited justice for the people of Israel.

When John was finally arrested by Herod I imagine that he was puzzled by the messages he got about the ministry of Jesus, who sent a message to John saying, “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”

What? Where was the superhero John pictured? This is not what John or the people of Israel expected of a true Messiah. Where was the final, victorious, crushing blow to the oppressors? Where was the tidal wave that swept away oppression? And he finally sent a message to Jesus saying, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” Is this a joke? The Messiah that came to them, that still lives among us, was the Little Lulu to the peoples' desire for the Incredible Hulk. You see, John and Jesus both died in the end. John died ultimately because of his condemnation of another's lifestyle. Jesus died, not condemning but loving to the end and ministering to one person at a time.

Barbara Brown-Taylor compares the ministry of Jesus to the shaping of stone by water. She says, “See that round hole there? Water did that. Drop by transparent, short-lived drop, water transforms rock as no tidal wave could ever do. For reasons beyond our understanding, that is how the Messiah decided to come—not all at once but steadily, drop by drop, for millenia. Every time someone lives as he lived by loving as He loved, another drop of mercy falls”.

Two current news stories were in my heart while thinking about this sermon. One, that didn't get a lot of coverage was about how all of the U.N.'s Millenium Development Goals for 2015 are having an impact. The millenium goals came together as a document in 2000 at a meeting where world leaders adopted the goals and committed to a global partnership. They addressed the issues of poverty, access to water, primary education for children, the child mortality rate, gender equality, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Today, we are seeing an impact in all the areas addressed. Are there still people living in poverty, with no access to good water? You bet. Are all children being educated and their mortality rates in sharp decline. Nope. We have a ways to go. Has HIV/AIDS been eradicated? No, again. But we are seeing a measurable difference in all these areas and are moving forward this year with sustainable goals and ideas. It didn't all happen at once and it took time. But it's happening one step at a time and little by little. Remember that even during the ministry of Jesus, not all the sick were healed, and not all the dead were raised. But what he started, “one drop of mercy” at a time, changed the world and is still changing it.

The other event in the news was the vote in South Carolina to take down the confederate flag that flew over the state capitol.

I do not believe for a minute that the flying of the flag caused a young man to gun down nine people. I also do not believe that taking down that flag...the taking down of a relatively small piece of cloth...is a cure all. What DID happen was the acknowledgment of the pain of a whole group of God's children about the unspeakable way their ancestors were treated and the way that, to this day, they are treated in subtle and not so subtle ways. We are all children of God and when we ignore the hurting hearts of others we are ignoring the message of Jesus.

That's what we as followers of Jesus are called to do. To fill one hungry belly at a time, to do what we can to heal one hurting heart at a time, to be an average, everyday hero to one person at a time. No fanfare or “whammo-blammo” needed. Just love as Jesus loved, walk in His footsteps, and know that one drop of mercy at a time can move mountains.