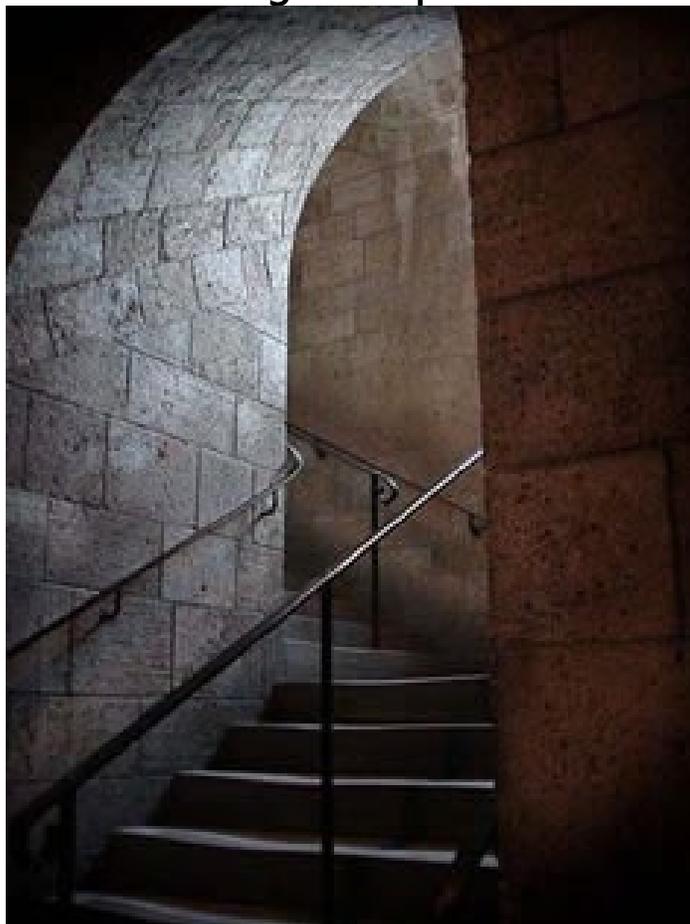


## Waiting for Superman



*Stairway at the Cloisters, photo by Rick Morley*

Luke 9:28-43

March 2, 2025 GRCC  
Russell Eidmann-Hicks

In one scene in the old movie, *Superman Returns*, Superman meets Lois Lane on a rooftop and invites her to fly by standing on his feet, and then the two rise up into the air, past the Daily Planet and high over the brightly lit streets and buildings of Metropolis into the stratosphere. There high above the earth, looking down at the curving planet and the sparkling cities, Superman asks Lois if she hears anything. "No," she replies. "Well I hear everything," Superman shares. "I hear the cries of millions of people asking to be saved, crying out in pain and suffering. I know so many people want to be saved."

Yes, people want to be saved, but I think in a different way than Superman expects. In the movie what it means to be saved is pretty clear, especially if you are in a burning jumbo jet hurtling head first down into a football field, or if you're locked in a sinking ship in arctic waters. Superman is constantly swooping in to save people from

showers of plate glass falling from skyscrapers, or catching buses that are about to crash, or grabbing the bank robbers as they flee with their loot. It is obvious that Superman is portrayed as a Christ figure in the movie.

But, you know, that seems a bit thin to me. That's not what Christ came for. I love Superman and have always been a comic fan. But when it comes to religion, comic books are just 2 dimensional, lacking depth and spirit. It seems a bit wacky that Superman would or could be the savior of the whole world. Can he really save everyone who falls out a window or is about to be hit by a train or car or bus or a bullet? Can he stop microbes from attacking vital organs or cancer from eating away at immune systems? Yes, Superman might save someone from a burning building or a meteorite hurling in from outer space, but can he save people from inner demons of depression, grief or loneliness? Can he fulfill our need for meaning and purpose and grant our lives a direction and vision? Can he swoop in, time and time again, to save our relationships from becoming stale or unforgiving, or our friendships from decaying? Can he teach us to create communities of authentic caring, of just relationships, of honest government and racial equality? Can he intervene in conflict with patient diplomacy to forge peace, rather than just beating up the bad guys?

Yes, this world needs a savior – but Superman, I've got to break it to you, you are no Jesus Christ.

Jesus certainly seems a lot like Superman. Superpowers: yup. Can see through walls and into souls: yup. Can walk on water: yup. Can look death in the eye: yup. Has special powers: yup. In our story this morning. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up onto a mountain to pray. (Interestingly, it says "the" mountain and not "a" mountain. "The mountain" has always meant Mt. Sinai – the mountain of God, where Moses met God and received the ten commandments.) When they are up on top, Jesus is revealed in his true identity – the radiant presence of God: *"While he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzlingly white."* He spoke with two super-heroes of faith: Moses and Elijah, about his upcoming Passion. Peter, James and John stayed awake and saw this, and figured, "Hey, this is it! This is the ultimate! Let's stay here!" Peter offers to make tents or dwellings for Jesus and his friends, so that they can stay. God speaks from a cloud, *"This is my Son, my Chosen, my Beloved, Listen to him!"*

Peter wanted to stay up there on the mountain with his superheroes. He wanted to stay in his room with his comic books and live in his fantasy world. But that is not how Jesus works. It is not about super powers and saving people from flaming monsters or meteorites. No, it is about going down to build the Kin-dom of God. It is about caring relationships, harmonious communities and honest leadership. It is about

God entering into the dust and blood of this earth, claiming it from evil and paving the way of grace and peace.

An indication of this comes from one of the temptations Jesus faced on his desert retreat when *the devil carried him to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'* In other words the devil is tempting Jesus with being protected from any injury or disaster – in the way Superman swoops in to protect people. But Jesus replies by quoting scripture, *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'* Salvation is not just about making sure bad things don't happen.

Jesus and his disciples go down from the mountain and in the next passage they are back in the salvation business. A crowd comes to meet him and a man from the crowd shouts out, asking Jesus to heal his son who is possessed by a demon. He had begged his disciples to heal the boy, but they could not. At this, Jesus gets mad. *"You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I put up with you?"* Why would Jesus get so upset? He is so angry because his disciples are not doing what he has taught them.

They are not carrying on his healing and teaching. He's angry because they do not share the spiritual powers that they have as his disciples, even though he told the church that everything he does they can do. They, we, do not trust our own power. Jesus is not the only one with gifts of healing, leadership, vision, and inner strength; each of Jesus' followers, each of us have unique superpowers of faith.

The biblical scholar, John Dominic Crossan, says that Jesus was brilliant because he created a franchise and not a monopoly. Jesus created a movement, a way, a church, and not a cult centered only on himself. He was unlike John the Baptist who created a monopoly. John was a great teacher and baptizer, and had many followers and disciples, but as soon as he was killed by the Romans, his movement fell apart. The Romans knew this: that the way to stop most rebellions is to kill the leader and it all ends. That happened with John the Baptist.

But Jesus from the start sent his disciples out to teach, heal and cast out demons. From the get-go, Jesus empowered his disciples and taught them that the Kin-dom of God is not just about worshiping him, but about following in his footsteps. It is about healing and teaching and confronting evil. It is about coming down off the mountain and seeking to help those in need, and not about being fixated on Jesus as a superhero.

It's easy to think that religious faith is about being supernatural – becoming extraordinary – a saint – and not just a person. No, it's not about being a special or better than everyone else. It is following in the footsteps of one who taught that humble faithfulness and deep love are worth more than swords and shields. Strength comes through weakness by offering our lives in service in God's name.

Jesus does not expect perfection, but he does expect trust and faithfulness. He expects that we will listen to his teaching and strive to bring healing and hope to this world. He expects that we will stand up to evil and cast out demons of violence and hate. That is why he was angry at his disciples that they could not cast out a demon. It's not about being Wonder-woman or Superman, but about being faithful, caring, and human. God came as defenseless child, and then walked in sandals among the poor teaching a path of non-violent love. Yes, he did miracles, but the miracles were to teach us the wonders of faith, compassion, harmony and justice. It's not about being special; it's about pointing to God's grace and peace.

I can imagine Jesus getting very angry at us to see how we have failed to live up to his teachings: the thousands of mentally ill or desperately poor who are homeless out on our city streets, the millions of children starving around the world, while so many live in luxury. He would be upset at us, his disciples, for allowing our churches to become self-serving and inwardly turned, rather than being mission stations reaching out to the hurting and hopeless. Jesus offered himself on the cross to begin a movement, to create a church, to start the ball rolling down the mountain that would do the work of transforming society into the Kin-dom of God here on earth. In the passage just before the story of the Trans-figuration, Jesus tells his disciples: *"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."* (Luke 9:23) He asks us to take up our cross daily. Daily. Every day we are to lay our lives on the line, to carry on the franchise, to seek healing and wholeness and the banishment of evil. Just as Jesus took up his cross and offered his blood and his dignity, so each of us are to give ourselves for the life and healing of this world.

At the end of the movie Superman Returns, Superman acts out his own passion story as a Christ figure. The evil Lex Luther makes crystals of kryptonite, and then stabs Superman with a dagger made of the stuff. Still, Superman finds the power to save the world by carrying a huge boulder of growing crystals into outer space. But as he does so, crystals of kryptonite surround him and take away his power. He opens his arms, as if on a cross, and falls down to earth, smashing into Central Park. He is carried by ambulance to a hospital where they take out splinters of kryptonite. And after being kissed by Lois Lane, the nurse finds an empty bed and an open window. Superman is back in the one-man-band, salvation business!

The story of Jesus is different. Yes, he saves us by self-giving love, offering himself as a sacrifice for the sins of all. Jesus does this not as a superhero, but as a model of how we are to live in this world: with humility, kindness and justice. Rather than having just one superhero, we have millions of followers of Christ, spreading care and healing and light. Instead of two hands, Jesus has millions reaching out with prayer and music, with clothing and food, with bandages and surgical instruments, with books and chalk. Instead of two feet, Jesus has millions, walking to work, to schools, to hospitals and nursing homes, to neighbors and friends. There are no superheroes here except the quiet courage of millions, transforming this world into Jesus' Kin-dom of justice, wholeness, compassion and peace. Let's continue the franchise that Jesus created – the Kin-dom of God here on earth. Thanks be to God. Amen.