

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered-Down

Tuesday, September 1, 2020

Heroes

This is the victory which overcomes the world, even our faith. —1 John 5:4

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 15:57

These were all commended for their faith. —Hebrews 11:39

The word *hero* has become a big part of our contemporary vocabulary, so much so that it is a word requiring a visit. Originally hero referred to a person of great strength and courage, possibly descended from the gods, who was to be held up as an ideal. We have long since stopped believing in the descended from the gods foolishness, but continued to seek and exalt heroes. In my lifetime the parade of heroes has taken a few interesting twists along the parade route!

Some of the earliest heroes I remember being encouraged to admire were Columbus and Washington, and while they had each changed the course of history, these two have fallen into deep disfavor in recent days due to their exploitation of slave labor. In the category of more recent heroes during my childhood were Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks and Gandhi. The 1960s gave way to a period of lament that there were no longer any heroes, for so many great people had been martyred (King), and so many once hailed heroes were now recognized as flawed (Columbus & Washington). That was also a time when the “anti-hero” was celebrated. This was the literary protagonist who had bushels of unattractive behaviors, but managed to shine as a light for the few helpful things that they did do. One thinks of the Clint Eastwood character “Dirty Harry Callahan” who dished out vigilante justice to thugs and other criminals which our justice system seemed unable to reach. But we can’t go forever without heroes, and as the furor of the 60s died down we began to hear again of the hero. Nurses and teachers were often hailed as heroes for the important tasks they perform. The modified heroic term “role model” became popular for many years, and the need for such helpful examples was much discussed for a while. In countless weddings that I have performed or attended I have heard it sung, presumably in honor of the bride and groom, that “you are my hero.” I suppose there is something heroic in stepping out in faith and saying “I do”!

9-11 changed the world of heroes in a big way. First responders became rightly exalted heroes as hundreds gave their lives on that horrible day so that thousands could be saved. Through the wars which followed that attack our military was again held up as heroic. First responders are still high on the list of heroes; however, recent troubles have caused the police to drop off of that list for many. Any traditional heroes

in general have taken a real hit in the recent months as rioters have torn down many statues of no-longer-worthy heroes during urban unrest. Even Frederick Douglass took a hit. Some crowds are awfully hard to please.

The virus has presented us with a new set of heroes. EMTs, and medical personnel have again been hailed in these days, as well as workers in nursing facilities, as they perform a crucial and merciful task, and do this at some risk. Grocery store workers and “essential workers” are called heroes. And along the line of the medical, I remember how I have been hailed as a hero for a number of years now as I am now working on giving my gazillionth gallon of blood. That’s what it says on the free t-shirt and stickers they gave me. Sometimes it doesn’t take much to be a hero.

The word hero has gotten quite a workout over the years as its meaning and requirements keep changing, and I suppose shall continue to change. Emerson remarked that “Every hero becomes a bore at last.” Pardon me if I have spoken a bit flippantly about heroes. There are indeed countless heroes before whom I am deeply grateful and humbled, but the word has also been tossed about in some rather irresponsible ways. This obsession with the term causes one to wonder—just what is it which fascinates us about heroes?

Obviously, we are all looking for ones worthy of admiration, especially in a world full of so many un-admirable people. We were made to have heroes to whom we can look up and be inspired. And while we may not be aspiring to be outright heroes ourselves, we rightly long to lead lives which are worthy of some admiration and nobility. The world searches for heroes, often desperately. We have been rejoicing in ours for millennia!

As the world continues its promoting (and demoting) of heroes, let us join in honoring those worthy of honor, but let us praise all the more joyously our great Hero, Jesus Christ, who defeated sin and death, watches over us in love and has prepared a Kingdom for us. And as we seek to include at least an element of the heroic in our own lives, let us humbly walk the path of faithfulness that all true heroes have walked, for this is our one true avenue to heroism. (Study Hebrews 11 sometime for a little heroic inspiration!)

The world is seeking a hero. In all the hero discussion, from the silly to the sublime, let us remember our true Hero, be inspired, and tell the world.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

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Set our hearts on fire with love of thee, O Christ our God, that in that flame we may love thee with all our heart, with all our mind, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and our neighbors as ourselves; so that, keeping thy commandments, we may glorify thee, the giver of all good gifts. —Eastern Orthodox