

Ascension Sunday – Year B – May 20, 2012 – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY

Based on Acts 1:1-11 written by Pastor Paul Horn

Listen to the Super Hero of Ascension Day

I. He has all the power

II. He empowers you to be his super heroes

Looking for something to do this coming weekend? I think it's safe to say that if super heroes are your thing, go see *The Avengers* in the theater. It'll most likely still be there, considering that the worldwide earnings on the movie is sky high. Speaking of super heroes... if you could pick one special power of one super-hero, what would it be? The strength of Hulk? Or would you like to be Captain America, the super Soldier, the world's finest unarmed combat fighter? Or Thor and have the ability to control lightning? None of the super heroes has all the special powers, so when they get together to fight the bad guys they complement each other. But none of the super heroes compares to the super hero of Ascension Day.

Today our lesson is from the book of Acts. Luke, the physician, writes this second book to a friend, Theophilus, to tell him about the power of Jesus. Luke tells us today, "Listen to the super hero of Ascension Day... he has all the power, he gives you the power to be his super heroes."

When we talk about super heroes, we have to talk about the origin of their super power. Spiderman, for example, bitten by a mutated spider in some laboratory... Dr. Donald Blake found a magical Norse hammer that transformed him into Thor. Superman came from the planet Krypton. Some say that about Jesus, that he came from outer-space. We know the origin of Jesus' power. God tells us in his Word. Jesus is true God from eternity. He existed before the creation of this world. In time, God the Father sent him down from heaven in bodily form, as we confess, "Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary."

Jesus proves his divine power. Luke wrote, "**After his suffering, he showed himself to [the apostles] and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.**" (vs3) Not many super heroes die. But if they do, they somehow miraculously, and ridiculously, come back to life, or they never really died in the first place. Sadly, some say that about Jesus. But we know that Jesus really died on the cross. He was buried. And then, by his own power, he raised his body from the slumber of death to life again. By flexing his divine muscles he proved his power over death and the grave.

Lest his apostles doubt, Luke tells us that Jesus "**gave them many convincing proofs he was alive,**" over the period of 40 days. He ate and drank with them. He walked with them. He had them touch his hands, they saw his feet, they put their hand where the Soldier's spear pierced his side – proofs that it was his body that had been crucified and died, but now was alive!

Then Jesus proves his power by leaving his apostles. He ascends into heaven. How does that show his power? Usually when a super hero leaves town for a while, bad things begin to happen. Not so with Jesus. In our Second Lesson from Ephesians we heard, "**God seated him at his right hand, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given. God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church, which is his body.**" (Eph 1:20-23) Although Jesus leaves

town, he doesn't stop working. His work is done, that is, everything that is required for us to get into heaven is finished. Now Jesus' work is to be active ruler over all nations. He sits at God's right hand – a position of all power. And notice, that he rules as King for the good of his Church – that's you, his people! He rules all things so that they work for your good. The super hero of Ascension Day has all power!

In comic strip movies when the super villains take over the city the citizens begin to lose hope in their super heroes, because it appears that the super heroes aren't using their super powers. Doesn't that happen to us, when the marriage isn't working, and we're struggling to communicate, there are different ideas about discipline, disagreements over finances, and we wonder, "Where is Jesus' power in my marriage?" Doesn't that happen to single people, who haven't found the "one" yet, and they feel lonely, maybe even abandoned by God? "Where is his power now?" You find yourself widowed, and you may feel that God has done this to you. "Where was his power when my loved one needed it the most?" Our country's heroes, our Soldiers, who redeploy to the States, and their friends and relatives find that some things still just aren't quite right with them and they wonder, "Why is God not helping my Soldier readjust to civilian life?" The Soldier recalls horrors of war, and wonders, "How could God in his infinite power allow this to happen? Or allow me to experience all of this?"

Super heroes have weaknesses - Superman his kryptonite – and so do we. We reveal the weakness of our sin when we doubt his power. It happens when it appears that he doesn't answer prayer, it seems like we can't see or feel his presence in our lives. And sometimes, not always, it's because we've shut him out. We've disconnected the power source, his Word, and forget his promises. But they're still there.

Our Risen and Ascended Lord Jesus again proves his Almighty power and his everlasting love for you by doing the impossible. He never once doubted his Father's presence even when he was about to suffer and die. He always trusted his Father's promises – he proved his power to resist and overcome the sin of doubt. Does Jesus have all power? Yes.

But then he sets aside his powers for a while. He allows the iron fists of Satan and death to pulverize him. But by not using his powers he takes vengeance on our evil villains Satan and our sins and death. He takes away the curse of our sin by taking the curse on himself. He destroys Satan's power to accuse us by allowing himself to be accused of our sins. He shatters death's grip forever by flexing his Almighty power and rising again, proving his victory, proving that all is done.

Jesus proves his power by giving you forgiveness through the simple sprinkling of water – that's powerful! Jesus proves his power by making his body and blood present with this simple bread and wine, the same body and blood that he has now in heaven – and through it forgiving your sins – that's powerful! By showcasing his power Jesus shows you his love for you. Love that proves he has the power, and will always have the power and use it for your benefit. He proves his power by sending the Holy Spirit.

Typically when a new super-hero comes to a city and uses his or her super powers everybody knows about it. It's front page news. People from Capernaum to Jerusalem were talking about Jesus of Nazareth. He had performed super-hero feats. He raised the dead, gave sight to the blind, caused dumb to speak, the lame to walk, and told the demons where to go. And now, after his resurrection, he tells his apostles, "You are witnesses of these things. Go and tell everyone about it!"

To equip them for this big job, he would send a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit to do this work. (vs5, 8) They had the Holy Spirit through faith. But now they would receive a special outpouring, with special gifts to carry out Jesus' commission – **“make disciples by baptizing and by teaching.”** (Matt 28:19) They would understand the Scriptures. They would be able to clearly explain the Scriptures to people. The Holy Spirit would enable them to speak in foreign language so they could take this good news to the nations. With this special outpouring they would be bold and courageous - super heroes! Through the apostles sharing the super power of the Word of God, Jesus would save people from the evil villains: sin, death, and the devil.

Next Sunday we'll see it – the day of Pentecost. On that day the apostles were not exposed to gamma rays from a science experiment gone wrong, but God the Holy Spirit himself. Read the rest of the book of Acts for your daily devotions the next few weeks and you'll see for yourself!

Today we do not receive the same powers as the apostles: the ability to heal the sick with a touch of the hand, raise the dead, or receive direct revelations from God. But you and I have received the same Holy Spirit. Through simple but powerful baptism, the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and through the Word of God and the Sacraments the Holy Spirit gives you the same power to be his witnesses. Through his Word the Holy Spirit gives you the desire to tell others what you have seen and heard Jesus do, both from the pages of Scriptures and from events in your life. Through sharing the Word of God, you are using the same super power that the apostles did, and even Jesus himself. The Holy Spirit even gives you the same boldness to stand before friends and family and confess Christ as your Lord and Savior. He makes you super heroes.

Jesus did promise, **“You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** And that happened. Today, you super heroes, continue to fulfill the promise Jesus made. “You will be my witness in Radcliff, Kentucky, North America, and to the ends of the earth.”

There are different ways to do that. I noticed that there weren't waiting lists to volunteer at the *Hooray for Heroes* booth yesterday, but that's ok, because that's not the only way to be Jesus' witnesses. It can be a simple invitation to a friend, “Come check out our church.” It's as simple as your offerings, some of which are used together with other Lutheran congregations to fund mission churches overseas and here at home. It's as simple as your prayers for the Lord to provide more workers for the harvest fields. It's as simple as supporting our TCW teams, or two youth group teams helping us in June and July. It's as simple as asking for an extra measure of the Holy Spirit to be bold witnesses, for we are all his witnesses. We are all his super heroes.

If you could be any super hero, who would you be? Hawkeye, the world class archer and marksman – that would be pretty cool. People stand back and watch in amazement when super heroes use their super powers. The same thing happened with the disciples, didn't it? As they were staring intently into the sky, after Jesus ascended into heaven, the angels had to give them a little slap up the backside of the head, “Why do you stand here looking into the sky?” Get busy! You have work to do! Use your super-powers – his Word! Be his super-witnesses! Amen!