

YOU'RE THE SUPERHERO YOU'RE WAITING FOR

Last week Congressman John Lewis, a very brave man, a man who let himself be jailed and beaten as he fought for civil rights, a man many have called the conscience of America was taken to his final resting place, South-View Cemetery, the final resting place of former slaves and the first generation of blacks born out of slavery. Praises for a life well led, for his accomplishments, for the way he encouraged others to fight for right have been filling the airwaves and the Internet and all forms of social media. In a time when too many of our leaders exhibit the mindset of scarcity, it's only natural we'd hunger for more courageous people whose lives model the mindset of abundance as did John Lewis'.

The thing is our texts this morning, especially the gospel lesson, are telling us if we're hungering for more courageous men and women with abundance mindsets, it's up to us to be them. We're not to look up in the sky for Superman or shake our heads, brokenhearted as we mourn the loss of a great man like John Lewis. We're to look in the mirror, point at our reflection and say, "It's your turn. Be the superhero I want to see."

In the Genesis text we meet Jacob on the run from his misdeeds, misdeeds so bad his brother wants to kill him. Yet Jacob has decided to stop running and make amends and is waiting to see if his gesture of repentance is accepted. He's sent all he had ahead of him and he's alone when he encounters a stranger and wrestles with him until daybreak. Somehow Jacob knows this is a turning point for him and if he gives up, he won't be able to move forward with his life. So he doesn't give up and, even though wounded, he prevails and receives the blessing he seeks. Many years ago I heard Rev. William Sloan Coffin remark that Jacob received that wounding so he'd never run away from God again.

Never run away from God again. Never run away from the source of love and strength that supports us as we struggle with the hurts and the questions and the disappointments that make up our lives. Never run away from God whose presence reignites the divinity in all of us that allows us to be superheroes like John Lewis because we're determined to do what is right.

So it is with Jesus and how he interacts with the crowd and the disciples in today's Gospel lesson where my theme from last week, that of how your point of view affects the way you behave, continues. You see I believe to be the superhero we want to see, we've got to stop looking on our woundedness as weakness, stop running from the mindset of abundance, stop running from God.

Our gospel lesson is a mini drama with three scenes that nicely illustrate the three points I'd like to make.

Point 1. To be the superheroes we're waiting for we've got to stop running from our woundedness. The first part of verse 13 tells us "Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself." The thing Jesus heard of was the death of his cousin John the Baptist. Jesus didn't pretend he wasn't deeply affected by this news. Too often in our society we're told to ignore our pain, distract ourselves from the things that hurt, take a pill, we're told big girls don't cry or hear little boys told to be men. Jesus models for us here not only is it normal to be vulnerable, to feel pain but to take care of ourselves in the midst of it. So he goes off by himself. And in the midst of taking care of his needs, he is touched by the needs of the crowd that has followed him. When we stop running from our own woundedness, we develop the compassion and the empathy needed to love our neighbor as ourselves. I find this truth echoed in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s words about the power of unmerited suffering and in the words of the

song Healing Grace by Rick Muchow where we're told there are good things only suffering can bring.

We don't want to think about the lessons suffering teaches us because people in their own discomfort with suffering are too quick to ply us with platitudes, No pain, no gain or He'll turn your scars into stars, saying well-intentioned but dismissive of the cost suffering brings. I suffer from shingles and had one of the worst attacks of my life about four years ago. I wouldn't wish the pain I went through on anyone, but having gone through it I have a deeper awareness and sympathy for people who suffer with chronic illnesses worse than mine. I'd never have developed the empathy I have now if not for that experience. Verse 14 shows Jesus having ministered to his own hurt comes on shore and has compassion for the crowds that have followed him and he heals them.

The disciples however have no such experience of compassion and tell Jesus in verse 15 to send the people away, to fend for themselves. To which Jesus replies: You give them something to eat.

And delivers point two of my sermon:

2. To be the superheroes we're waiting for we've got to stop running from the mindset of abundance. The disciples give Jesus the classic double take. Huh? We feed them? All of them? When all we've got are five loaves and two fish? The disciples are looking at the paper and only seeing subtraction, that if you give away a corner you'll only have three left, if you're generous there's less left for you. Jesus however knows the power of abundance, the more you give away the more you have to give away. He sits down with what the disciples sees a little, as insufficient, and blesses it, knowing that with the power of God in the middle of it all there will always be enough. And that's why we're a church and not an ethical culture society, isn't it? That we believe there

is a power we can access and channel for good when we work together, that's bigger than any one of us alone. That each of us individually to quote Mother Teresa are the pen in the Master's and together to quote Father Oscar Romero we are the hands and feet of Jesus.

Which lands us at point 3: To be the superheroes we're waiting for we have to acknowledge and proclaim that when God gets into the mix not only is there enough, but there's plenty left over. We have to model behavior that says "look" not only have all eaten and had their fill, but there's still plenty to share. We need to stop rationalizing about the source of the good we do doesn't just come from us alone. Good is greater than evil, generosity is more powerful than selfishness, a mindset of abundance will always produce more than a mindset of scarcity. Through Christ who enables us to do all things, who has come that we may have life and have it to the full, we can be the superheroes we want to see. My prayer for all us today is that we look into the mirror whether on the wall or in our hearts and say yes. I can and will be the superhero I want to see.