

“We Could Be Heroes”
July 10, 2022

Luke 9:57-62

“We could be heroes, just for one day.” If you recognize those words, it may be because they are the lyrics to a familiar chorus. And the chorus is part of a song entitled “Heroes” that has been covered by a number of musical artists in recent years. But I still remember the song when it first came out.

The music and the lyrics were created by David Bowie back in 1977 when I was twelve years old. I distinctly remember playing this song way too loud in my teenage bedroom. And singing along, especially when it came to the chorus. Like so many good songs, there is nothing that can compare to the original.

If you know the song and you are singing it in your head, you may remember the way the song starts out fairly quietly. Then there comes a point in the song when the drums kick in and the bass line picks up volume and David Bowie’s starts to belt out the words accordingly. Building crescendo all the way to the chorus, which is so simple and yet so aspirational all at the same time.

We could be heroes, just for one day. Ordinary people like you and me. We can do extraordinary things. Each of us has a heroic tendency inside us. And we could exercise that tendency for one day. Or perhaps for more than one day.

The question the song raises is, will we? Will we be heroes? And the unfortunate answer is, it’s not likely, even if Jesus Christ is the one asking... **(1)**

The subtitle of this morning’s Gospel story reads, “Would-Be Followers of Jesus”. Which gives us a clue right off the bat. Nevertheless, the story starts out with every good intention.

A whole bunch of people showed up out on the road to see Jesus that day. They had heard rumors about Jesus. The charisma with which he preached. The miracles he performed. The uncanny way God’s love seemed to pour forth from him. And they wanted to try and catch a glance.

Isn’t that the way it always is? When the star of the show comes through town, we don’t want to miss out. We want to be in the loop and part of the experience. In case something amazing happens, we want to be there to witness it. Or maybe, just maybe, some star power will wind up sprinkling on us.

In the case of the people by the road, they were ready. Dressed in their finest outfits and jostling their way as close to the front of the line as they could go, they craned their necks and stood on tiptoe to see Jesus. And sure enough, when Jesus drew within earshot, someone in the crowd called out.

“I will follow you wherever you go!” Luke never tells us whether this eager onlooker is male or female. But Jesus decides to call their bluff. “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. In other words, do you really know what you are asking? Do you have any idea how hard it’s going to be? And then Jesus turned to another in the crowd and offered a simpler, less cryptic invitation. “Follow me.”

Against the odds, Jesus decides to stop on route and offer these crowd members the chance of a lifetime. Everything the onlookers could have wanted. In an instant, Jesus has called their winning number and he stands there waiting for a response...

Follow me. We could be heroes just for one day. And the first bystander looks right at Jesus and says, “I’d really like to join the group, but if it’s okay with you, I need to go and bury my father first.” Whereupon Jesus turns to the second spectator who offers this reply. “I plan to follow you asap, but I first want to go and say good-bye to the people in my family so they won’t miss me when I’m gone.”

Jesus gets ready to turn his head back toward the road so he can start the caravan in motion again. Before he does, however, Jesus offers a final word of advice. Or maybe it’s a final warning. “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.”

Those would-be followers of Jesus. They could have been heroes. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and he knows intuitively the end of his life is approaching. Understandably, Jesus is looking for teammates. People who will stand up and be counted alongside Jesus. Men and women who will promise to remain with Jesus through thick and thin. Jesus needs devoted advocates.

Yet the people on the roadside have excuses. Reasons that sound legitimate. Reasons we can all sympathize with. But not the kinds of reasons that enter hero’s minds. Heroes don’t make excuses. Instead, they do whatever needs to be done, often without giving it a second thought.

It doesn’t even have to be a big thing. When your grandchild comes up to you and asks whether you can help them build the Lego kit they got for their birthday. And you respond with, “give me some time to finish what I’m doing and then I’ll be happy to give you a hand.”

Or the person on your way to work who holds up one of those handmade signs. “I’m hungry. Can you spare any change?” And you think to yourself, “well, I don’t really have time to stop and pull out my wallet. I’m in a hurry this morning, but I’ll be sure I have some change ready the next time I’m passing by.

Yes, we could be heroes. The problem is that too often we can’t figure out how to get out of our own way. We spend so much time making it about ourselves that we

forget it's actually all about God. What's more, it's all about Jesus who told us in his ministry that he did not come to be served but to serve others. And reminded us more than once that the first must be the last and the least among us are the greatest.

Rev. Dr. Fred Craddock tells a story about a young man in his twenties dying of AIDS in hospital in Atlanta:

“He had no church connection, but someone said he had relatives who had been in the church, so they called the minister of that church, and the minister went to the hospital. The young man was almost dead, just gasping there, and the minister came to the hospital, stood out in the hall, and asked them to open the door. When they opened the door, he yelled a prayer into the room from the hallway.

Another minister there in Atlanta heard about it and rushed to the hospital, hoping the young man was still alive. She got to the hospital, went in to the room, went over by the bed, and pulled the chair by the bed. The minister lifted his head and cradled it in her arm. She sang. She quoted Scripture. She prayed. She sang. She quoted scripture. She prayed. And he died. Some of the seminarians said, “Weren't you scared? He had AIDS!” She said, “Of course I was scared. I bet you I bathed sixty times when I got home.” “Well then why did you do it?” “I just imagined if Jesus had gotten the call, what he would have done. I had to go.”

(Craddock Stories (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), p. 86.

Will we be heroes? It's unlikely because we mostly prefer putting ourselves in the spotlight. Making it all about our own agenda, even when Jesus Christ is inviting us...urging us...calling our bluff... to do something bold and wonderful for someone else.

But that doesn't mean it's impossible. Just by showing up here for worship this morning, chances are good you said to yourself that for an hour or so, I want my life to be more about God than it is about myself. And you just might take that same frame of mind with you when you leave worship this morning. When you're at work tomorrow. Or when you're outside playing with your kids. Or when you see your neighbor pulling up in their driveway.

Maybe you will hear a voice saying to you, “it's better to serve someone else than it is to serve myself. It's better to think about someone else before I think about myself. It's better to do something kind for another person than it is to get wrapped up in my own pursuits.

You and I could be heroes. Even just for one day. What do you think? Amen.

(1) Rev. Mark R. Feldmeir, “Ready for Prime Time” as printed in the book, *Testimony to the Exiles: Sermons for GenXers and Other Postmoderns* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003) pg. 101.

