

Send Me

Last week, I watched the Christopher Reeve documentary about the actor who played Superman who in the mid 1990s suffered a terrible horseback riding accident that left him paralyzed. In the aftermath, rather than giving up, he and his wife Dana became huge advocates for the disabled community. For me, I wanted to watch this documentary because Superman is the first movie I remember ever watching.

I was six years old and I had a stomach issue that we couldn't figure out exactly what was going on. I ended up in the hospital several times that year. And while it ended up being something easily treatable and, in the big scheme of things, not a big deal, we didn't know that at the time. All I knew was that I was in an unfamiliar place, I felt awful, and, even though my parents were there with me, I was scared. And one of the nurses brought in a TV on a cart with rolling wheels with a VCR and I watched Christopher Reeve in the first Superman movie.

And I can't tell you how great it was and how good it made me feel. It was a great movie, a fun movie, but there was more to it than that. Even though I couldn't understand why when I was a 6 year old, the movie made me feel like everything was going to be ok. I think I now know why.

It's a comforting thing to know that there is an all-powerful force working for good in the world. I imagine all of us have moments where we need a Superman.

And sometimes that's what we want God to be. My guess is that's what many of us are longing for right now. I confess that this week, I've wanted a Superman like figure to put Elon Musk in his place, to swoop in to the USAID office and demand that the world's poorest people would be protected, to rebuild Gaza for the people of Gaza, to end war, to ensure that our democracy would not crumble. I've wanted a hero to believe in, a hero to help me know that everything is going to be ok.

And, if I'm honest, there's a lot of the time when I wish God would work that way, or, at the very least, to send us that hero. I would love for God to just use the power that created the universe to end climate change, to make racial and economic justice magically appear, to rid the world of guns and weapons, to make the world heaven on Earth. And if God isn't going to supernaturally intervene, then at the very least, can't God send us that charismatic leader than can bring us all together, that can give us hope, that can solve our problems.

No doubt, we've had charismatic leaders before who have led movements into making the world a better place. But if I look at our faith story, that's not how God usually works. If anything, the people God calls throughout Scripture are decidedly uncharismatic. They are scared people often with a troubled past. They are people who never imagined in a million years that God would call them and never imagine in 10 million years that they could do what God was asking them to do. They are people like Isaiah in our story today.

Isaiah's first reaction to God's call is to cry out that he is not worthy. "I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips," he says. Surely God has the wrong guy. But the angel had a different message. It's exactly people like Isaiah that God needs.

God doesn't need superheroes. Rather, God needs ordinary people like Isaiah, ordinary people like you and me – people who sometimes get it right and who sometimes mess up – to trust God enough to say, "Here I am, send me."

When we adopted our mission statement to be an open Christian community to belong, to grow, and to engage the world in acts of service and justice, we did so with a recognition that this mission is in part descriptive – it describes who we are, but it is even more accurate to say that it is proscriptive – it reminds us of who we want to be.

We want to be a community where all can belong, where all can grow, where all can engage the world in acts of service and justice. This is a mission that is a journey and not a destination. We never get to a place where we can say, "Yep, we've got belonging figured out. We've done all the justice there is to do." No, we are always called to go deeper, to learn how we can be more inclusive, how we can do more work for justice, how we can grow as individuals and as a community."

So when you decide to get involved, you are helping us make that mission more of a reality. Frederick Buechner once said, "God calls you to the place where the world's deep hunger and your deep gladness meet." And while church is not the only place to live out that vocation, I can guarantee you that there is something happening at this church where your deep gladness intersects with the world's deep pain. You can find meaningful ways to live out your faith here. You can find meaningful ways to make a difference in the world here. And because we are part of a community, we don't have to do it all alone. None of us have to be superman. None of us have to do more than we have the capacity to do. The great hope of the church is that if each of us do whatever little bit we can, then together, this community can do amazing things.

But let me offer all of us a word of caution. Community is beautiful. But it's also messy.

There will be times when I disappoint you or when Shelly will disappoint you or times when we both disappoint you. There will be times we do something or say something you disagree with. And, there will be times when the church decides to do something or a board decides to do something that you disagree with. You won't find everything we do to be your thing. No one (or at least very few people) are going to resonate with every single thing we do.

Rabbi Benjamin of Congregation of Beth Shalom led his synagogue through a visioning process a few years ago and he gave a speech entitled, "Dissatisfaction guaranteed." His point is that being a part of a faith community inevitably means that there will be times when you are dissatisfied, times when you wish we had done things differently, times when you disagree with something.

But don't spend the majority of your time in church thinking about or talking about what you're against. Instead, give yourself to something you're for – whether it's singing in the choir or planning or hosting coffee hour or doing a service project or helping to plan worship or serving on a committee or volunteering with Sunday school or youth group or joining a small group or visiting those who are sick or homebound. You see, just as I can promise you that no one is going to resonate with every single thing we do, I believe that every single one of us can deeply resonate with *something* that we do. Find what that is and give yourself to that.

We were going to have the Engagement Fair today and that's what the engagement fair is really all about. What is that thing that makes you come alive. My guess is that is the exact thing this church needs you to do. And so even though we've rescheduled the fair, I want to invite you to think about that, to pray about.

What is it in this place that makes you come alive?

And when all of us do those things that make us come alive, even if it seems small, even if it seems to be insignificant in a world with such big problems, remember the stories of our faith.

Remember the stories when Jesus said the kingdom of God is like a tiny mustard seed that becomes an overpowering bush. Or the story when Jesus fed thousands with only a few pieces of fish and bread. Remember that God almost never called the biggest or the strongest or the smartest, but rather ordinary people who never felt like they were up to the task. If we learn anything from our faith story, it's that God doesn't need Superman. Rather, God needs a lot of people, who may feel inadequate, who may feel scared, but nevertheless are willing to join together to do what they can.

As much as we'd like to have one, we don't actually need a superhero either. We need a community, a community just like we have here, of people who are willing to give of themselves in ways small and large. And we need the faith to believe that in a world with big problems, these acts of each of us giving what we can, doing what we can, serving where we can are what truly makes the difference.