

“Life in the Pits”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
August 13, 2023 - Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost - Proper 14

[Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28; Matthew 14:22-33](#)

Superheroes of all kinds donned their capes and masks and zoomed through the halls of the church each day this week during our Vacation Bible Blast program for kids. It was a pleasure to be among this happy band of heroes and their intrepid league of leaders and to see them grow closer as a group while learning about their God-given superpowers of having hearts filled with goodness and courage, minds sharpened by knowledge and wisdom, feet steadied by hope, and voices readied to proclaim messages of God’s love by possessing God’s indwelling, empowering Spirit. I am grateful to Donna and our team of adult and youth leaders for generously giving of their time and energy to offer this meaningful, enriching program, and I know that our kids and their families, along with the whole of our church, are thankful as well. Kudos!

One of my roles during this year’s program was to lead our Bible lesson times, and it was during one of our lessons that we looked at the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount and how Jesus teaches us in them about the superpower of hope, that even in the times when life is hard, when we are sad or hurting in spirit or because we are busy doing God’s work of seeking peace or acting mercifully, God is with us, blessing us with good things, enabling us to persevere in doing what is right so that we can work to create a better world for all people.

As I was preparing for this lesson, I was reminded of another superhero, Batman, who learned about the power of hope through his own struggle to overcome adversity. In the 2012 Christopher Nolan film *The Dark Knight Rises*, we find Batman, rather we find Bruce Wayne, living in a pit, a subterranean prison somewhere in the Middle East, being taken there by a musclebound villain named Bane after losing a fight with him and having his back broken. Bruce, with a broken back and stuck in a pit, was in a hopeless situation. While he slowly recovered his strength and abilities, he was still stuck deep below ground with other prisoners, who told him that only one other person had ever been able to escape, for the pit was too deep, and though the walls of the pit had small ledges that seemed to offer a way up and out, the distance between some of them was

too great for even the best leapers to successfully navigate. Even after months of living in the pit and trying, unsuccessfully, to escape, he never lost hope. Eventually, after attempting to leap from ledge with a rope, which was tied to an anchor mid-way up the pit and fastened around him, breaking his fall and keeping him from dying, Bruce decided to give up the rope and to take the great risk of leaping without the safety it provided. It was only when risking all in this dangerous attempt that Bruce Wayne was successful in making the seemingly impossible jump from ledge to ledge and rising up and out of the deep pit. After dropping another rope from the top of the pit for the other prisoners to use to climb out, he returned to Gotham City as a renewed and inspired Batman to take on the bad guy Bane once more. I won't provide any more spoilers in case you haven't yet seen the movie.

This episode of the hero accomplishing what seems impossible, especially when all seems lost and hopeless, connects with me because I've had so many moments in my own life when I felt that I was defeated, broken, and stuck in a pit with no way out. Perhaps you've felt this way too over the course of your lifetime. Maybe you've been thrown into a pit, like Joseph, by your own family or by someone or something else. Or maybe you've found yourself sinking downward by your own proud action or fearful inaction, like Peter, who climbed out of the boat amidst the storm, but lost his faith and began to sink as soon as his feet hit the chaotic waters. We've all been there, or are there, but God does not want us to sink down and live in the pits of brokenness and despair, but for us to rise from them.

And so God reaches out to us and seeks for us to hold on, like Peter grasping the outstretched arm of Christ, when we feel we are sinking. God calls us to trust and be faithful when we are in a pit, and relying on God's grace, to keep trying to rise when feeling stuck, taking uncomfortable risks, leaping without a rope if needed, to rise rather than despairing and hopelessly consigning ourselves to life in the pits.

If you find yourself at the top of a pit, reach down for others or drop them a rope, and then, giving thanks for God's saving grace, take other bold actions as one of God's superheroes in the world (no cape required). Amen.