

Thomas R. Cook  
St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota  
8:00 and 10:00 Celebrations of the Holy Eucharist  
The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost – August 23, 2015

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## “Cosmic Faith Superheroes”

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Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-20; 13 Pentecost B (Proper 16)

Note: Preached on the Sunday of the baptisms of Georgia Collins and Graham Pearce, 10:00 a.m. in the creek.

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I bet you guys didn't know you were going to be superheroes this morning. Nevertheless, when you rolled out of your comfortable beds and began your Sunday morning routines, the *Forces of Evil* took note of your transformations. And you thought that you were *just getting dressed* when you put on your belt this morning. But, no, you strapped around your waist the “Belt of Truth!” And as you buttoned up that shirt or blouse, you really were securing your “Breastplate of Righteousness!” And shoes? Well, I brought along my special superhero shoes this morning [**SHOW WATERSHOES FOR USE IN THE CREEK AT BAPTISM**], ready to carry me safely into the surging waters of the Minnehaha Creek to proclaim the “Gospel of Peace!” when we baptize Georgia and Graham this morning. And your shoes will carry you there too. Your “Shield of Faith?!?...” I like to think it could be that nametag many of you picked up at the door to place upon your chest that lets others know you as a sister or brother in Christ. Your “Helmet of Salvation!?!?” Well, unless you are wearing a hat, I haven't figured that one out yet. And your “Sword of the Spirit!” Now, *that... that* you came here to sharpen this morning by hearing and

acting on the Word of God. You are completely decked out to stand firm against the wiles of the devil, the spiritual *forces of evil* in the heavenly places.

For all its wonder and beauty, the world is a difficult and challenging place. Not everything is well. Not everything is as it should be. And the letter to the Ephesians, from which we heard this morning, reminds us that there is more to it than meets the eye. You see, for the person of faith, the battle isn't only with the daily challenges and choices and dangers and confrontations which the world throws at us. --- You know... how can I be an honest person in a world filled with deception? How can I be a generous person in a world filled with greed? How can I be secure when others want to destroy security? How do I respond faithfully to the incredible needs of others in my community or around the world? How can I raise my children as people of faith when the world seems to be losing faith or distorting it to ugly purposes? How do I persevere and hold on to hope in the face of illness and aging and loneliness?--- For the writer of Ephesians, it's more than the daily battles of living; it's really a sort of cosmic battle for the human soul. There's something going on beyond us alone... it's like the very confrontation of the goodness that God would have us know with the darkness that is the work of the *forces of evil* that most any of us can understand if we ever read superhero comic books as a kid or watched any of the *Star Wars* or *Harry Potter* movies. "Good" and "evil"... they're out there. But which will we choose to let "in here" **[pointing to the heart]**?

So when confronted by the *spiritual forces of evil* that would attempt to claim our souls, destroy our hope and wholeness, and lead us away from the God who loves us all so deeply, we do what any self-respecting body of Christians would do. We throw water at it! We baptize! We gather as a community in faith, we acknowledge the power of evil at work in this world, and we remember the goodness of Jesus who shows us the way to overcome it. And that way is love. In baptism we come together as a people who care for one another, and we symbolically wash away the taint of sin that surrounds us from the moment of our birth. Remember, we don't have to be a sinner for sin to work on us. We just have to be here, and the *forces of evil* will try to do their dirty work. But in baptism, we wash all that away. Evil won't taint us forever. We say in baptism that we "die to sin and rise to newness of life," fresh and ready to confront the evils of the day with the goodness we know from God.

But there's more. I want us to remember this morning that baptism is a sacrament, and a sacrament, as many of you will recall from your Confirmation, is "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." What I'm saying to you is that baptism isn't some magical act that makes you good and makes God love you. Baptism is the sign that you are already being called to goodness, and that God already loves you and is at work in you. Through whatever practice or hope or habit or momentum that has brought Georgia and Graham and their families here this morning, look with the eyes of faith and see God within it all, shaping their hopes and

choices, forming this community of St. Stephen's Church, calling each one of us to receive and care for these families and for any who come in faith searching for God at work in their lives.

So, you remember what happens in the *Wizard of Oz*, right?... That wicked witch is about to do her worst and hurt Dorothy and her friends and her little dog too, so she sets Scarecrow on fire. And Dorothy does what any self-respecting and caring person who loves her friends would do ... She grabs a bucket of water and throws it on Scarecrow to wash away the fire. And in doing so, she soaks the Wicked Witch with water too. And the Witch just begins to melt away. She can't take it. Washed away is the evil by the kind and faithful act of a true friend. Okay, so Baptism is a lot more than just a scene in an old movie, but I get it. When we baptize Graham and Georgia today, we put out the fires of evil. The evil melts away, but they don't melt away in the waters of Baptism, rather they are saved in them by the grace and goodness of God already at work in their lives. That water makes them stronger and makes them a part of a very large family of faith along with us.

You know, our superhero outfits ---our belts of truth, our breastplates of righteousness, our shoes of peace, our shields of faith and our swords of the Spirit--- our spiritual outfits don't mean that evil won't try to work its ugliness upon us. We aren't really superheroes, at least not like in the comic books. We are just people

trying to love God and one another and to live in the way Jesus taught us to live. We are a part of this world, and we live and serve in it. But Baptism... Baptism binds us together with God and one another. It is a sign of the strength we have to care for one another in times of trial, and to be a force for good in the face of the forces of evil. Baptism is hope and it is faith. And it is a blessing to take part in it once again, together, today.