

Proper 24B

Mark 10:35-45 & Stewardship

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October 17, 2021

In the 1960's, comic book creator Stan Lee introduced a nerdy teenager named Peter Parker to the world. Peter is an orphan living with his Uncle Ben and Aunt May in New York City when he is bitten by a radioactive spider giving him super spider abilities. He discovers that he has super-fast reflexes and super strength. Just like a spider, he can stick to and climb walls. Even more amazing is the sixth sense he receives, called his "Spidey-sense" that allows him to sense and react to danger before it happens. Using his scientific knowledge, Peter creates web fluid and shooters that allow him to sling webs so that he can swing from building to building, tie up the bad guys, and hold things together. And thus, Peter Parker's alter ego, Spiderman, is born.

Even though Peter Parker is now a superhero, he struggles with learning how to use and what to do with the powers he has been given. He also wrestles with finding the balance between his superhero life and his day-to-day responsibilities of school and home life while keeping his identity a secret. Spiderman learns the hard way that whenever he fails to respect his powers or uses them foolishly or for his own gain, things go downhill quickly. Uncle Ben, in one of his heart-to-heart talks with Peter, tells him, "With great power comes great responsibility." This phrase drives Peter to make the necessary sacrifices so that he can use his powers to serve those around him.

The phrase, "With great power comes great responsibility" is known today as the Peter Parker principle, but its origins have been traced back to the French Revolution. However, it goes even further back than that to a revolution that starts over two thousand years ago in Israel when an unassuming thirty-something carpenter's son named Jesus uses His powers for the good of all humankind. Jesus gathered around Him the first twelve disciples who struggled and wrestled with their powers that come directly from Jesus.

In today's Gospel, James and John ask Jesus to sit at His right and left hand. Their quest for their own gain and glory leads to another downhill spiral among the disciples just like when they argued about who was the greatest. Jesus then tells His disciples, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave to all," or to paraphrase, "with great power comes great responsibility."

It always amazes me how frivolous Jesus' disciples are with the powers and gifts they have been given. I'm not just talking about the famous twelve. I'm talking about all Christ's disciples throughout the ages and across the globe; His disciples in the here and now. Peter Parker was changed by the bite of a radioactive spider thereby receiving gifts of great powers. We are changed by Jesus, by His touch on our hearts, by the water of baptism, and the anointing of oil

on our foreheads marking us as Christ's own forever. we receive the power of the Holy Spirit and become stewards of Christ's love for the world.

Our superhero power is the power of agape love. While agape love isn't uniquely Christian, what is unique is the way we receive that power and how we are called to use it. This great power of love comes from God sending His son Jesus Christ into the world for us and from Christ's sacrifice for us upon the cross. And it isn't just love we receive. We receive the powers of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and peace. These are awesome superpowers that we have been given, and we are called to use them in service to one another. "With great power comes great responsibility."

In a few weeks, we will celebrate All Saint's Day where we remember all the saints, also known as superheroes, who used their power of love for the greater good of humankind. We will sing, or at least I hope we will, about the saints of God "who love to do Jesus' will" and can be met "in school, or in lanes, or at sea, in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea, for the saints of God are just folk like me, and I mean to be one too." We are all saints, aka superheroes, imperfect as we are, struggling to do our best to use our great power of love and the gifts we have been given the best way we know how, just like Peter Parker struggles with how to best use his "Spidey-powers".

Jesus tells us to take the powers we have been given and become servants to each other. To make the necessary sacrifices for the good of all humankind, so that all God's children can thrive and grow. We are servants, stewards of Christ and the powers that He gives us.

Stewardship of Christ's love comes in many forms. Right now, here at St. Michael's, we are being asked to prayerfully consider what our individual stewardship will look like, and how we will use these awesome powers we have received through Christ to serve one another and to serve the world through our mission work. The question is whether our decisions will be based on the viewpoint of scarcity or the viewpoint of abundance.

Think of it like this, Spiderman's powers, just like our powers of love and grace and so on, aren't going to disappear. They will always be there. But all the rest- the day-to-day stuff of life- just like Spiderman's web fluid is finite. It gets used and needs to be replaced. What would Spiderman's world look like if he used his web flinging fluid from the viewpoint of scarcity? If he was so worried about not having enough, that he used it cautiously for only the good of a few, instead of using it to fight every injustice he saw each night? Luckily, even though he knew his supply of web fluid was finite, he saw it as a gift of plenty which allowed him to use it with abandon, bringing hope to all those around him.

Likewise, we are called to use our gifts with abandon, seeing all we have as a wealth of riches, not as defined by worldly standards, but by divine ones. Giving through the lens of abundance allows us to appreciate life in its fullness and bring light to the dark places of the world.

Whatever our stewardship looks like, it is important to remember that whatever give, we aren't giving to a budget. We are in life together, so whatever we give out of our abundance of God's gifts to us, we are giving to the growth of our faith. We are giving to building relationships with each other. We are giving to our mission projects outside our walls. Whatever we give, we give to one another as servants to God's children and stewards of Christ's love for us and for the world.

Just as there are three pillars to the Episcopal faith- scripture, tradition, and reason- there are three pillars of stewardship- time, money, and talent- our spiritual gifts. For St. Michael's health and vitality, we must live a servant life, sharing our spiritual gifts through both pledges and acts of stewardship. As a verse and chorus from "The Servant Song" by Richard Gillard says:

We are pilgrims on a journey.
We are travelers on the road.
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

Won't you, let me be your servant.
Let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I might have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.

Servanthood is stewardship. Stewardship is an act of love driven by the power of love. How we use the gifts given to us by God and the great powers we have received from Jesus Christ is entirely up to us. It is our choice whether we see our call to stewardship through the lens of abundance or not. As Jesus tells all His disciples, "...whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave to all," or to paraphrase, "with great power comes great responsibility."

Amen

The Servant Song by Richard Gillard © 1977

Won't you let me be your servant.
Let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I might have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey.
We are travelers on the road.
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night time of your fear.
I will hold my hand out to you;
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping.
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,
We shall find such harmony
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.

Won't you, let me be your servant.
Let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I might have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.