

KAILUA CHRISTIAN CHURCH
SUNDAY, FEB. 4, 2024
SERMON: BATMAN JESUS
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Mark 1:29-39

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **30** Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. **31** He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons.

33 And the whole city was gathered around the door. **34** And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. **36** And Simon and his companions hunted for him. **37** When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." **38** He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do." **39** And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

John 8:23-30

23 He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are from this world, I am not from this world. **24** I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he." **25** They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all? **26** I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him." **27** They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father. **28** So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. **29** And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him." **30** As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Sermon: Batman Jesus

Jesus in the Book of Mark sometimes reminds me of a DC Comics character. He's like Batman, out there heroically saving people under the cover of night, battling demons left and right with his heroic strength and spiritual prowess.

And I do mean Jesus was specifically like Batman in Mark, as opposed to Spiderman or Superman. For those of you who aren't comic book geeks, Superman is an alien with superpowers who comes from the Cosmos to protect planet earth. Spiderman gets bitten by a

magical spider that gives him the power to spit webs from his hands and climb buildings with it.

Batman, unlike all the other iconic superheroes, is just an ordinary guy who hasn't contracted any sort of magical abilities. Batman, whose real name is Bruce Wayne, witnessed the murder of his parents as a child and vowed to use all his resources as an adult to fight evil in the city. He battles the bad guys in his fictional home of Gotham City under the cover of night, wearing a disguise.

The Book of John's version of Jesus reflects more of the character of Superman, in which Jesus is an elevated supernatural being that came to be with mankind and save us. Mark, however, has our Batman Jesus prowling around in the shadows, hiding his identity, and sneaking off to be alone often.

Ok – put on those Bible Nerd glasses now that I sometimes make you wear.

In theological language, we call this superhero progression between Mark and John Christology. Christology means the spectrum of human-to-God qualities that range in Jesus' character and behavior. Scholars call Mark a “low Christology” Gospel, whereas John is a “high Christology” Gospel. Mark was the first written of the four Gospels and conveys a time in early Christianity that was terrified, secretive, and urgent. John was the last of the four canonical Gospels written and depicts a time that is farther removed from the chaotic events of Jesus' death and the fall of Jerusalem. Mark has a grittier quality to its writing and John has a more ethereal quality to its writing. Mark has a more human Jesus, and John has a more godly Jesus. In other words, Mark has Batman Jesus and John has Superman Jesus.

When the Council of Nicea came together in the year 325 to decide which books belonged in the Bible as we have it today and what books didn't, they sidelined Gospels that conveyed Jesus as either too human or too removed from being human* and settled on the four that we have now as being an appropriate range of understanding Jesus' Christology across a spectrum from Mark to John.

The Council of Nicea thought it was important that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. They determined that the revolutionary quality of Christianity was not only that God came to earth to walk among us, but that he deliberately inhabited all the suffering and strife of the human experience, rather than acting as an untouchable angelic figure that can't be hurt or killed.

You can take those Bible Nerd glasses off now and we'll go back to Batman Jesus.

Batman is by far and away the most popular character in comic book history because he's so human and relatable. We can't have alien superpowers like Superman, and there's no such

thing as magical spiders that give us web hands. We can, however, imagine ourselves being vigilantes fighting crime alongside Bruce Wayne in his Batman costume, wielding nothing but his own tenacity and hunger for justice. Batman feels attainable to the human imagination; Batman is a source of inspiration that we too can muster the courage to do something radical to change the world.

The fascination with Batman is the reason that Mark's Jesus, who is battling demons at every corner, going off in dark corners to hide, and being "hunted" by his followers, is so important for understanding God's plan for us in delivering his Son to earth. Batman Jesus shows us that our experience matters. Our trauma and thirst of justice and the rollercoaster of the human experience is validated by Batman Jesus. God not only sees us in the shadows crying out for deliverance, He came to experience that pain and struggle alongside us. And, like Batman, Mark's "low Christology" Jesus shows us that we can triumph over that struggle and the darkness does not get to win.

We need Batman Jesus because he shows us the image of God in ourselves and the power He places in us to restore the world. In the arrival of His Son, God has placed empowerment in humankind to overcome darkness and transform the world into the Kingdom of Heaven, which is essentially what we Christians are called to do.

The Council of Nicea, however, was very deliberate about balancing the Batman Jesus of Mark's Gospel with the Superman Jesus of John's Gospel.** At the end of the day, Batman is just a fictional character. In reality, if any of us tried becoming night vigilantes against the powers of darkness, there would likely be very strong repercussions of crippling depression or dangerous hubris that would leak into our actions and overtake our mission. As a person who has worked in fields that may be defined as heroic, like warzones and homeless shelters, I can tell you first hand that playing hero is not as glamorous or helpful as we often imagine it. People who go out to save the world often end up destroying themselves or the communities they're attempting to save in the process.

Jesus is different from us because he wasn't just a human heroically slaying demons by night, He was also the otherworldly Son of God. Without God, human exploits to save the world fail. Superman Jesus from the Gospel of John centers the salvation effort on Him alone, with us humans seeking hope and justice as simply workers building His vision. We can do nothing on our own and rely on God's guidance to deliver that justice from God that makes the world whole.

John's Superman Jesus takes the pressure off of us to be vigilante Batmans battling demons in the lonely darkness. God is with us and understands us through Batman Jesus, but God guides us and saves us through Superman Jesus. Batman Jesus understands you, and Superman Jesus saves you.

Whatever demons you're battling in your life, God experienced those same demons as Batman Jesus. He gave us the power to take back our lives from those demons and prevail in hope and peace. God also tells us through Superman Jesus that we need not carry the weight of battling those demons alone, and that He is the otherworldly mover than can make true change happen. God is the ultimate superhero that surpasses anything you can imagine from DC Comics and is greater than all those characters combined. May God be with you battling those demons alongside you, and may you trust in God to guide you toward a renewed future under Him.

Amen.

*The Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary were not canonized (made part of the Bible) for this reason – they follow an early Christian thought pattern called Gnosticism that believed Jesus was a spirit from God, rather than a full flesh and blood human being.

**Just for fun, if we're imagining the Gospels as superhero characters, I would say Luke is Dr. Strange and Matthew is Professor X. Of course, the Gospels are not an exact analogy to the superhero universe, but many characters born in modern literature and cinema do take the characteristics of ancient religious literature. The Gospels have an important story to share and plenty of fictional media from The Lion King to DC Comics utilizes its themes.