

SPEAK UP  
[written in oral form]

?Who used to read comic books?  
Who still does?

Comic book superheroes appeal to the desire for someone else, someone powerful to fight for the weak / to fight against evil.

In a way, they are statements of hope / of a vision for good to prevail.

All the superhero movies attest to the allure of that aspiration.

Yet, things have gotten weird. The latest superhero movie has Batman fighting Superman.

Really?

Have we given up on our superheroes?

~~~~~

There was a time when people looked to God for salvation.

Before superheroes were conjured up, people in the West, and beyond, put their hope in the church. The church was supposed to be the means for changing the world.

There were songs of hope, hymns of triumph and symphonies of adoration and aspiration.

Now days, with some exception, music has lost its utopian ideal.

"All you need is Love" is a charming chant from the archives.

Even the usurper superheroes are fighting each other.

We still have corruption, injustices and war,.... yet our hopeful vision is covered with cataracts.

I wonder,.... has God become smaller..... more distant?

Has Christ become merely a nice ideal that's unrealistic?

Is he just a Messiah to be admired.....or a superhero who's run his course? ????

Nevertheless, we still care. We do care.

There are still too many threats, too much violence... and too many sorrows.

More and more, people are giving up hope. The church is shrinking, voting is decreasing, and suicide is increasing.

To be sure, there's lots of complaining and ranting, yet much of our engagement for change takes the form of Facebook posts read by our friends.

~~~~~

My sermon title is "Speak up", and I need to define what I mean by that.

Sometimes we "speak up" to increase decibels to be heard.

That's a kind gesture.

Sometimes we "speak up" to increase the decibels to be assertive.

That's bullying.

Sometimes we "speak up" to translate our language, and that's ignorant.

*Have you ever seen that happen--when someone is speaking to another who doesn't know English? < Saying it louder doesn't help.*

~~~~~

The "Speak up" I'm referring to is to address/converse at a higher level.

It is to speak with respect, to articulate with grace and love. Speaking up can be the presentation of justice and ethical concerns with compassion.

Also, Speaking up can mean inviting God into the conversation.

It is elevating the topic beyond the bickering and mundane.

Speaking up is Not the same as "Speaking Out".

Speaking Out is engaging in society's conversation at that level, and it includes exposing issues and concerns, too. It's good to speak out against injustices. There are many good reasons to speak out.

Yet, it sure seems like a lot of people are speaking out, these days, about almost anything.

Ranting about something is common.

Of course, we are not hearing those who aren't speaking out.

Lots of people write blogs, use twitter, post comments or call talk radio shows.

*Personally, I do Not care for talk radio. I'm not interested in hearing Bob from Timmins opinion on Climate Change.*

*I want to hear what an expert knows.*

~~~~~

No doubt, it can be risky speaking out....if the message is counter to public opinion... or goes against the current.

~~~~~

*While living in Kansas, I wrote a letter to the editor advocating Gun Control.*

*I received numerous death threats, and some of them weren't nice.*

~~~~~

Still, we need to speak Out to expose/reveal injustices and destructive behaviour.

~~~~~

This past week, the musician/artist Prince died.

I read and heard him described as a Black or African American entertainer.

Not once did I hear someone speak out against that label.

David Bowe wasn't labelled a "white" entertainer.

Moreover, women are too often devalued with such labelling, too.

As if to say, she exceeded expectations.

Shameful,..... and such demeaning remarks must be called out.

~~~~~

There are countless reasons to Speak Out, such as about the Palestinian situation or Climate change.

Speaking out is presenting "What is" or What shouldn't be.

It can be informative, even confrontational, but.... it is rarely transformative.

Ranting at a politician will not render the change that is desired.  
It may be illuminating, but speaking out rarely invites change.  
Speaking out is presenting "What is" or What shouldn't be.

In contrast, "Speaking Up" declares "What can be".  
Speaking up introduces a higher level/ a transforming perspective.  
Speaking up is creative and constructive.  
We can "Speak Up" for people, as to build them up.  
And, when we pray.....we are speaking up to a higher level - to God.  
>The "higher level" is God's domain.

~~~~~

Today text from the book of Numbers presents a story about speaking up.

The father of five sisters died, and the custom/tradition of the time was extremely patriarchal. Only sons inherited the estate, and note the estate included possessions and the legacy. In this case, brother of the deceased would get the inheritance, and this would also end the family tree.

The five sisters humbly and respectfully addressed the leaders, the high priest and Moses. They spoke up for justice!  
They asked to be treated as sons/as worthy children of their father.  
They were heard, and not turned away or ignored.

Then, Moses took their petition for change to God.  
He spoke Up to God. Moses invited God into the conversation.

And, **God spoke up** to all the people by declaring a new "higher" understanding of justice. This was transforming, and it stemmed from compassion / from love and concern for five people.

~~~~~

Women were regarded as property, but by divine decree were then allowed to own property and own their family's legacy.  
This was huge.  
Granted, this was just a beginning. Sons still held preference.  
Yet, this opened the door to the possibility of equality.... to hope.

*Quite often, the "slippery slope" tilts upward.*

Speaking up allowed everyone to hear and receive God's passion for equality and respect,.....even when it meant changing the laws and the old customs. All because, people with names were involved. It was personal.

Speaking up changes the tone and the message into a "third way."

~~~~~

In our time of extreme polarity, we are in desperate need of a third way / another way.... of a transforming way.

Internet and mass media is producing a cacophony of "Speaking Out"  
It is no wonder that the absurd message "Trumps" all others.  
(And, I do mean Trump).

Too few are speaking UP.

~~~~~  
This past week, area ministers had the pleasure of listening to Stuart Murray. He is the author of "The Naked Anabaptist" and many other books.  
He talked a lot about living in the world of post Christendom.  
That is the situation in Britain and Europe, and we are trending that way, too.  
He gave examples of people who know nothing about the Bible and who have no idea who Jesus was.  
Many have heard of Christianity, and they assume it wasn't a good thing, but that's about all they know.  
The few churches in Britain exist in a theological blank slate culture.

Murray prefers being called a follower of Jesus, and he noted that the church can no longer depend on good deeds/acts of kindness as being associated to attributes of God. Action needs words.  
All must be explained and taught as Paul did in Athens.

This is a lesson we better learn. We need to start using our words.

~~~~~  
Yet, are we the church speaking up?  
Where is Christ?  
Who is fighting injustice and evil?  
Who is transforming the world for good/ for justice/ for peace?  
Or,...has our rational, pragmatic culture outgrown the need for superheroes?

~~~~~  
~~~~~  
Well,.....in Manchester, England, Roger Hayhurst, most nights, dresses up in a blue outfit, with ski gloves and a mask with sown in goggles. He roams the area of rowdy pubs to break up fights, and when all is calm, he hands out food to homeless people. He calls himself the Knight Warrior.

Mr. Extreme patrols the crime-ridden streets of San Diego wearing shin guards, a cape, a army helmet with goggles and spiked arm pads. He carries pepper spray, and tries to discourage criminal activity.

In Perth, Australia, Clamp Man is dressed up in a green leotard, rainbow socks and glued-on mustache. He carries a an angle grinder so he can cut off wheel clamps placed on cars for illegal parking. He does this in poor neighbourhoods, saving people a \$135 fine.

Chris Pollak lives in Manhattan, New York. He calls himself the Dark Guardian. He's identified with a hooded mask and a tight red and blue sleeveless shirt. He confronts drug dealers and prevents muggings.

Captain Australia is my favourite.  
He's middle aged. His costume includes gardening gloves, a funky hood with goggles and yellow ears. His vest is green with a yellow circle a sign that means "at". He assumes that his mere presents will deter crime,.....and I'm sure it works.

Thanatos wears a green skull mask, a black hat and a black trench coat. He or She prowls the inner city streets of Vancouver, handing out food and clothing to people on the street. And, she believes she scares away criminals, too.

I should note that there are plenty of real-life women superheroes, and they tend to have better taste in apparel.

One is The Chinese Redbud woman in Beijing, China. She dresses in black, with a black cape and a blue mask.

Like others, she hands out food to the homeless people on the streets.

~~~~~

Do you see a pattern here? And, it's more than wearing a costume.

People haven't given up!

People are hungry for help and to help. People are hungry for someone to speak up for them,... hungry for a superhero.

~~~~~

When was the last time.....we were accused of acting like Christ?

When was the last time someone pointed to us and said, "There are those people acting like a superhero."?

~~~~~

I'm not suggesting we wear bizarre costumes.

Most of us would not look good in leotards and tights.

Yet, maybe Paul was on to something with his "whole armor" metaphor?

~~~~~

There was a time when people looked to God for salvation, when they hoped to find Christ through the church.

There were no superheroes. Superheroes were created because.....

.....well,.....because we the church became more concerned about being correct than loving and respecting all people.

The church aggressively defended tradition and laws, and the poor and exploited became nameless.

Too often, we the church **rarely spoke out**, but instead arrogantly spoke down, and never **spoke up**.

The church sought to defend Christianity and God, and neither should be defended. God is bigger than that, and Christianity is a "way" not an institution,.....or at least,.... it shouldn't be an institution.

But alas, I'm merely speaking out.

~~~~~

God calls us the church to be Christ....to do the impossible... to proclaim **WHAT CAN BE...** to be the hope and healing.

It is time to speak UP-- To Speak UP on a higher level/to bring peace.  
heroes.

There's just you and me, by the grace of God, boldly following Jesus.

There are no human super