

Everyday Heroes

by Rev. John Williams
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I've been thinking about heroes lately. I grew up on Superman and Batman comics so I *know* what heroes are supposed to look like. You could always spot them in a crowd because they wore such neat outfits and had such good posture. They were always the “good guys” and always did the right thing. I wanted to be just like them. When we were in grade school, my best friend and I decided to become heroes. We donned capes and masks and patrolled our neighborhood, on guard for bank robbers and gangsters; the kind of nefarious thugs who would be most likely to have their secret hideout in the quiet neighborhood of a small farming community in rural California. We protected our neighborhood for weeks until some of the older girls on the block caught us one evening, wrestled us to the ground and de-masked us; exposing our secret identities and forever rendering us ineffective as heroes. My friend and I were certain the girls were hired by the bank robbers and gangsters who wanted to hide out in our neighborhood.

The news recently has brought other heroes to mind. SuperBowl XLIII gave us the heroics of James Harrison and Santonio Holmes. Harrison's end zone interception and 100 yard touchdown run was only eclipsed by Holmes' incredible catch in the last few seconds of the game, cinching the win for Pittsburg over Arizona. The fans went wild and both players became instant heroes ... at least until the next game.

In January, we heard the incredible report about Flight 1549 and “Sully” Sullenberger who safely landed that US Airways Airbus in the Hudson River shortly after takeoff from La Guardia airport. In a crisis situation, this dedicated, trained and experienced professional kept a cool head and did what needed to be done to save the lives of his passengers and crew. Captain Sullenberger and his crew not only became heroes to those who survived the crash and the potential destruction to the city, but to people around the world.

Most of the heroes I know, however, don't wear capes or SuperBowl rings or receive the Key to the City. I sat in a room full of retired clergy recently. They were retired missionaries, pastors, chaplains and regional staff. They were heroes who have given their lives in service to Christ and His Church ... Last week I worshiped with a congregation whose pastor was called in 1979. For almost 30 years he has cared for and served that one congregation, but also many other congregations across the Central Region through his involvements in camping and other ABCCR activities and programs. He is a hero; but so is his congregation for encouraging and sharing their pastor with the wider ABC family. ... Over the past several months I have had the privilege of participating in a couple of ordinations that were over a decade in the making. These two men and their families hung on “over the long haul” to make the necessary sacrifices to complete seminary training and take the steps they needed to take for ordained ministry. For one it meant the move to a new country, leaving family behind for a time, learning to navigate the confusing paths of a foreign culture and finding a place in a strange new world. These newly ordained pastors, and their families, are heroes... Several days ago I attended the funeral of a friend. It was the fourth funeral in a week for which the local pastor had been called to render care and ministry. Though physically exhausted, he continued to offer words of hope and comfort. He is a hero. ... At our ABCCR Board Meeting last week I saw more heroes. Confronted with all the uncertainties that change brings, I saw board members and area moderators enthusiastic and excited about the ministry possibilities God was placing before them. None of us know exactly how things will get done, but all of us know God is at work in the midst of God's people. Heroic faith and hope have taken root.

We don't have to look very far to find the real heroes around us. They are those men and women who quietly and humbly offer themselves as the hands and feet of Christ and make a difference in every life they touch.

In February and March, we see two very special youth events: Jamboree and Gathering. The men and women who plan, organize, promote and pull off these events are remarkable heroes in the lives of young people across the Central Region. They receive very little recognition for their efforts, but make a tremendous impact on young lives nonetheless. Consider the professors and instructors in our institutions of higher learning. The students who pass through the halls and classrooms of Bacone College, Ottawa University and Central Seminary graduate with more than a diploma and a degree; they graduate better equipped to take their place as heroes in their own right, making a difference wherever they go. Why? Because their lives were touched by the heroes of our educational institutions; the men and women who have placed themselves in God's hands to make a difference in the lives of their students.

So what about you? Who are the heroes you see around you every day? What words of encouragement and appreciation can you offer to those individuals who make a difference in the lives of others? More than likely those you see as heroes never see themselves in that light. Like Captain Sullenberger, they are just doing their jobs, just doing what they can, just doing what they know is right. ... And just as important, how are you being a hero? It's a good question, for the call of God upon our lives is a call to humbly offer ourselves as the hands and feet of Christ to make a difference around us. This year's *America For Christ Offering* theme challenges us to be those heroes who, with willing hands and grateful hearts, touch others for Christ. "With Willing Hands: Serve - Sacrifice - Surrender" we are told. This is more than the theme for an offering; this is the call of God for every Central Region Baptist. The ways you can fulfill that call are more numerable than I can count; but in your faithful response to Christ Jesus you will touch lives, you will become the hero God intends you to be.

*I've been thinking about real heroes lately. ...
I've been thinking about you.*