

Open Prairie United Church of Christ
August 5, 2007
Rev. Curran Reichert

“We Will Not Take What is Not Ours”

Once upon a time, in a parallel universe there were three Super Heroes, respected the world over and admired far and wide. By any modern day American standard, these men were amazingly successful. They had amassed wealth beyond their wildest dreams, they possessed tremendous power and wielded great influence. Each of our Super Heroes had a special talent which they had been given by God to use for the greater good, but which eventually turned to greed and led to the destruction of their super powers.

The first went by the name, Michael Vick’s “Vapo’ Rub.”¹ He was given the gift of being able to run very fast and throw a pig skin covered ball very far. People admired him greatly for his talent, but something happened along the way, money, prestige and power alone were no longer sufficient for our super hero Vapo’, he wanted more. So he began to use his money, prestige and power not for good, but for ill. His greed became so profound that he would stop at nothing to protect his interests.

¹ Reference made to Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick facts based on a report by © MMVII, CBS Interactive Inc. and The Associated Press.

When indicted by a federal grand jury on charges related to illegal dog fighting, our fallen Super Hero replied, “I had no idea (my) property might have been used in a criminal enterprise and I blame my family members for taking advantage of my generosity.” Vapo’ faces \$350,000 in fines and six years in prison if convicted of the charges. My, my, how disappointing.

Super Hero number two: Barry “The Batman” Bonds came from a long line of Super Heroes, son of former Major League All-Star Bobby Bonds, a distant cousin of Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson, and the godson of Hall of Famer Willie Mays (yes, I did my research).

The Batman was endowed with amazing talents, enabling him to attain numerous single-season and all-time career baseball records as well as seven MVP awards, 12 Silver Slugger awards, (more than any other player) and eight Gold Glove awards. All of which amounted to, you guessed it- tremendous money, prestige and power.

Let’s face it- man, woman or child, who doesn’t love a handsome, well toned Super Hero. Faster than a locomotive and able to break world records in a single inning? The Batman quickly became more than a Super Hero, he became a Super Star. But this Super Star became super suspicious when at an age when most players performance begins a slow decline, his production began to accelerate.

Not only did he start foolin' around on his wife, 250 million viewers nationwide began to suspect The Batman of using banned steroidal substances after observing his transformation from lanky speedster to hulking behemoth, seemingly overnight.

And despite the fact that last night, when he hit his 755th home run he matched Hank Aaron's all-time career record, his reputation has been forever tarnished by allegations that he did not achieve his success fair and square. The Bateman is currently under investigation for perjury by a federal grand jury regarding his testimony before the 2003, wherein he denied using performance-enhancing drugs. My, my, it is disappointing.

Our third super hero was born in Delaware County, Pennsylvania and given the gift of being able to call a foul shot from a foul play in the game we like to refer to as basketball. His name is Tim "Doughboy" Donaghy. Doughboy Donaghy used his power for good to referee thirteen seasons in the National Basketball Association (NBA). He too had amassed great riches, influence and power. And just like Vapo' and The Batman, Doughboy Donaghy lost sight of his commitment to fairness and right relationship. According to the latest tabloid favorite Super Hero's Gone Wild; "Donaghy resigned from the league on July 9, 2007 prior to reports of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for allegations that he bet on games he officiated during his last two seasons and that he made calls affecting the point spread in those games." My, My, My...

Why, the FBI is currently investigating whether Doughboy Donaghy fixed the games because he owed gambling debts to organized crime figures. Former Action Hero and baseball commissioner “Flava” Fay Vincent is quoted as having said. "I think this is a very bad mixture of things that are going on right now. I think there's a whole lot of rethinking that has to go on. This calls for a significant re-examination of what we do with off-field behavior." ²

Today’s scripture is about exactly that, it is about our “off-field behavior.” Jesus tells a parable about a rich farmer who allowed love of possessions to dominate life. He warns us against all kinds of greed. Life, Jesus says, cannot be determined by the abundance of possessions and as is his custom, Jesus tells a story to help the questioner understand life in kingdom of God.

A rich farmer gives all his energy to acquiring possessions and building bigger barns. Secure in what has been stored, the farmer feels he can relax. Buy a Barka Lounger and watch the game on his flat screen-so to speak. But death, now here’s a party pooper, threatens to take all of it away. Death, tabloids, the FBI, the IRS-bottom line, the bigger they come, the harder they fall.

² Excerpt loosely based on an article by Erik Brady, from USA TODAY.

And you know these are the people we love to hate aren't they? They have ever thing we've ever wanted. And we can say, "Oh no, I never wanted to sit in the lap of luxury, own a fancy car or fly to Bermuda when the weather gets bad in Illinois" but we're lying. The truth is if we had amassed as much wealth, power and privilege as this guy with his barns or our fallen Super Hero friends there's nothing saying we wouldn't have behaved exactly the same way.

We live in a consumer driven economy and the majority of us spend most of our lives just trying to keep up with the standard set by the rich and powerful-so when they take a tumble into the seedy underworld of gambling and drug abuse we can't say were really very sorry to see them go. I read this parable and think, "that rich man-he had it coming. Fat cat, he deserves to be threatened by God."

But did you know that those of us sitting in this room represent the wealthiest top three percentile in the world? Kind of makes you have to stop and ask where have I put my treasures, the gifts I have been given for good? Have I stored them up in the hopes of getting richer or am I putting them to use for the good of the human family.

See that was the mistake of the rich fool, he may have been told he was going to die and that his surplus would rot and go to waste, but just imagine the joy he would have known if in the short time he had left, he had spread out his abundance among the community.

It's just a thought, and I'll leave you with another, also from Luke's Gospel 12:34, "Where your treasure is, there your heart shall be also." There is a little song that goes with it to help up remember let's sing it together it goes like this,

Where your treasure is there your heart shall be.

All that you posses will never set you free,

seek the things that last,

come and learn from me.

Where your treasure is your heart shall be.

May we as a community of faithful people seek to be ever mindful of our "off-field behavior."

Amen