

## Looking for Superman

Acts 14:1-19

Peter Hiett

August 26, 2007

“Superman’s Song”

-by Crash Test Dummies

Tarzan wasn't a ladies' man  
He'd just come along and scoop 'em up under his arm  
Like that, quick as a cat in the jungle  
But Clark Kent now there was a real gent  
He would not be caught sittin' around in no  
Junglescape, dumb as an ape doing nothing

*Superman never made any money  
For saving the world from Solomon Grundy  
And sometimes I despair the world will never see  
Another man like him*

Hey Bob, Supe had a straight job  
Even though he could have smashed through any bank  
In the United States, when he had the strength, but he would not  
Folks said his family were all dead  
Their planet crumbled but Superman, he forced himself  
To carry on, forget Krypton, and keep going

*Superman never made any money  
For saving the world from Solomon Grundy  
And sometimes I despair the world will never see  
Another man like him*

Tarzan was king of the jungle and Lord over all the apes  
But he could hardly string together four words: "I Tarzan, You Jane."  
Sometimes when Supe was stopping crimes  
I'll bet that he was tempted to just quit and turn his back  
On man, join Tarzan in the forest  
But he stayed in the city, and kept on changing clothes  
In dirty old phonebooths till his work was through  
And nothing to do but go on home

*Superman never made any money  
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[Film Clip - "Superman"]

[Superman rescues Lois and delivers her to the balcony of her apartment. She's positively flummoxed.]

Superman: You okay?

Lois Lane: Uh-huh.

Superman: Good night.

Lois: Good night. [Superman flies away.] What a super man . . . *Superman*

. . .

[Lois hears knocking at her door. It's Clark Kent.]

Clark Kent: Lois? Lois? Anybody home? [Lois opens door] Uh, hi. Can I come in?

Lois: Oh yeah.

Clark: Lois, for goodness' sake, didn't you hear me knocking?

Lois: Uh huh.

Clark: Lois, we did have a date tonight, remember?

Lois: Oh.

Jesus, we pray that you would help us to preach the Word. Help us to preach you. In your name we pray, amen.

[Singing] "Superman never made any money, for saving the world from Solomon Grundy, and sometimes I despair the world will never see another man like him."

This age laments the loss of its heroes. We are just like Lois Lane. Remember how she was always looking for Superman? We have such a need for heroes.

When you were little, for most of you it was your mom or your dad. Then you turned thirteen.

We hope our friends are Superman. I remember thinking one day long ago, "Gosh, Lord, none of my friends are all together. They're all screwed up . . . like Andrew Trawick or Alan Parsons."

We look for Superman or Wonder Woman. You know, every time I thought I found her, I was disappointed.

Maybe it's an entertainer, a politician, a sports legend . . . John Elway or Muhammad Ali . . .

In 1998, Muhammad Ali was a passenger on a flight from Chicago to Vegas. He was confronted by a flight attendant who told him to fasten his seat belt. Ali replied, "Superman don't need no seat belt!" To which she replied sweetly, "Superman don't need no airplane."

*We need* our heroes.

The sociologist Ernest Becker argued that youth was made for heroism. So youth need heroes to emulate.

So quite reasonably folks will argue, “The problem with places like Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado is that we have no more heroes—supermen. Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold needed a goal, a dream, of Superman, like youth did in the 1930’s and 1940’s.”

In 1938, Superman came out in DC Comics and took our country by storm. But the idea of Superman reigned in other countries as well.

In 1938, a philosophy of Superman was taking nations by storm, but that Superman wasn’t a dream to be discovered so much as a goal to be achieved.

I bring you a goal. I preach to you the Superman. Man is something to be overcome. . . . You have traveled the way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. . . . Lo[is], I preach to you the Superman. The Superman is the meaning of the earth.

“Das Uebermensch”—the Superman.

As you may remember from our sermons on Genesis, those are the words of Friedrich Nietzsche. His most ardent disciple in 1938 was a fellow named Adolph Hitler. And his most ardent disciples around these parts were two Columbine kids named Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris . . . yet maybe not, for just about everyone in high school is trying to be Superman. Maybe we all are.

“Man is something to be overcome. Lo, I preach to you the Superman.” Dreams of Superman . . . looking for Superman . . . how do we get to Superman?

In Acts 14, Paul and Barnabas travel to Lystra in the Roman province of Galatia. We know something of Lystra from antiquity: In Ovid’s *Metamorphosis*, he tells of this legend that Zeus (the high god) and Hermes (his messenger or word) once visited a valley near Lystra. When they did, they went door to door in the likeness of mortal men. No one recognized them except an elderly couple, who took them in.

In the morning, Zeus and Hermes flooded the valley but turned the elderly couple’s shack into a temple of gold.

What a crazy idea . . . that God would hide Himself in human flesh and ask us to receive Him into our hearts and homes, and that this would somehow be judgment. Stupid pagans. Where do they get this stuff?

Well, anyway, in Lystra, they were dreaming of a visit from Superman.

Acts 14:8-19:

*Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, “Stand upright on your feet.” And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple*

*was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds.*

What a scene! They think Paul and Barnabas are gods!

*But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you . . .*

They run out into the crowd crying, “We’re not gods! We’re *homoiopathes*!” It means “of like human passions”: hunger, thirst, weakness, grumpiness, sin. “I’m homoio-pathetic! And it’s very dangerous for us all if you don’t believe me.”

Sometimes I’ll preach the Good News and the sermon will go well, and someone will say, “Wow! That was a great sermon. You’re amazing!” I need to hear that, so I say, “Thanks,” yet I try to find a way to also say, “But please, please, please understand I’m really kind of a butthead . . . like Alan Parsons or Andrew Trawick. I’m homoio-pathetic, and if you don’t believe me, it will hurt you and then you will hurt me.”

*. . . and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.” Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.*

Why do Paul and Barnabas think this is so dangerous and not just humorous?

*But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.*

Did you get that? Those very same people who think Paul is a god in verse 18 are now stoning him to death in verse 19. How weird is that? It’s like yelling, “Messiah! Hosanna!” on Sunday and “Crucify him!” on Friday.

I read that Captain Cook was revered as a god when he landed in Hawaii. When an angry native struck at him, forgetting he was a god, Captain Cook groaned. One of the natives yelled, “He groans! He’s homoio-pathetic!” And they killed him.

Dreaming of Superman can be pretty hard on Clark Kent.

Jerry Siegel and Joel Shuster were skinny, shy, teenage nerds when they created Superman in 1933. You see, Siegel and Shuster patterned Clark Kent after their insecure selves.

In 1938, they sold the rights to Superman for \$130. Both became poor, old men while the world paid DC Comics hundreds of millions of dollars to get to Superman.

In 1966, Shuster stood on the sidewalk on the opening night of the Broadway musical “Superman.” Later he shared, “I couldn’t afford the price of a premier ticket. I just huddled out there while the celebrities arrived and everyone gawked at them.”

Everyone was looking for Superman, and they walked right past his heart: Clark Kent, Joel Shuster.

George Reeves really made Superman famous. He played Superman on TV. In 1959, he was found alone and dead in his home. A gunshot wound had killed Superman. It was ruled an apparent suicide caused by depression. Reeves had been unable to find meaningful work, because he had been typecast as Superman.

Everyone saw him as Superman, and nobody saw George Reeves . . . his heart. Typecasting folks as Superman, looking for Superman, our expectations of Superman can be deadly. Especially for Clark Kent.

Because Hitler was so earnestly looking for Nietzsche’s Superman, millions of Jews, Eastern Europeans, and gypsies were slaughtered. They didn’t measure up. Kids at Columbine High didn’t measure up either. Some thought Dylan and Eric didn’t measure up, and Dylan and Eric thought the others didn’t measure up.

You know, the only institution that really opposed Hitler’s quest for the Superman in Germany was the dissenting church: Martin Niemoller, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer . . . the only institution. Why was that? Was it because they dreamed the Jews were Superman rather than the Germans? No. Was it because they had no dream of the Superman? No.

Actually they did: They had the incredible idea that 2,000 years ago He came in the body of a Jewish baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And ever since that time, He still shows up in just the strangest places. So every stinky manger is sacred; every person is sacred.

Did you know that 2,000 years ago when He showed up, there was an end time, apocalyptic fervor among the Jews, far more intense than Hal Lindsey’s *The Omen* and all the *Left Behind* series put together? (Think about it: They must have wondered, “Why are we all counting down to 0? 3 B.C. . . . 2 B.C. . . . 1 B.C. . . . What’s coming?”)

But seriously, because of biblical prophecies and the political situation in Israel, they were dreaming of the

Superman, dreaming of the Messiah more intensely than at any other time in history.

So skeptics will say, “See, that’s what created Jesus of Nazareth.” That’s stupid. It’s just the opposite. That’s what got Jesus of Nazareth crucified. It was the religious and political wish dreams of the Jews—dreams of power and political glory. It was those dreams that got the Messiah crucified. Dreaming of Superman, they crucified Superman. For what did He look like? He looked like Clark Kent.

Dreaming of Superman, they crucified Clark Kent . . . and He let them! Why?

Well, who could slap Clark Kent and get away with it? Lois Lane, right? And why was that? Because he loved her.

Now, she didn’t know Clark was Superman because Clark wouldn’t tell her. And why wouldn’t Clark tell her? I suppose it’s because he wanted her to love *him*: Clark Kent. And if she really saw him, she’d really see Superman. Jesus said, “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.”

You know, Clark Kent was Superman emptied of his power and glory. Yet actually, Superman's real glory was his heart (not spandex and a cape). And his heart was revealed in Clark Kent.

"Let me help you, Lois, let me get that for you, Lois." Kindness, meekness, self-sacrifice, mercy.

- It's not that the same heart wasn't in Superman.
- It's just that when someone runs faster than a speeding bullet or leaps tall buildings in a single bound, you tend to overlook their heart.

Do you suppose God has a heart?

Remember how Lois Lane would talk about Superman, dream about Superman, look frantically for Superman, all in the presence of Clark Kent? So dreaming of Superman, she'd ridicule Clark Kent, belittle Clark Kent, and ignore Clark Kent. Dreaming of Superman, she'd step on his heart (that is, Clark Kent).

Sometimes she'd have these amazing encounters with Superman when he'd save her in a crisis, with his powers. Yet her longing for those experiences just blinded her to his heart.

At the movies, the whole theatre wants to yell, "Lois, he's right in front of you! He just has glasses on! Look!" But her dreams of spandex and a red cape blinded her to Superman's heart, and thus blinded her to Superman.

That must have just crucified his heart.

Do you suppose God has a heart?

Well, the religious folks crucified Jesus for their dream of Jesus. And He let them. How come? He loved them. He loved His Bride. He died for her sins—our sins—to heal our blindness and purify our dreams. Then He rose from the dead in His resurrection body, revealing Himself to those who loved Him in His body of weakness.

As He left, taking His resurrected body with Him, He said, "And Lo[is], I am with you always." We say, "Where? We see no body."

- We dream of Him, long for Him, seek Him.
- We call out for His power and His miracles.
- We sit in church and picture Him shining on the clouds of Heaven.
- We cry out, "Come, Lord Jesus! Come, Superman! I want you. I need you, because I'm sick of my church. It's full of morons and boneheads, and the weirdest part is, they're all named *Clark*."

Didn't Jesus say, "Whatever you do to the least of these my brethren, you do to me"? Didn't Paul teach, "We are now the Body of Christ"? And he called Christ the "Eschatos" Adam—"Das Uebermensch," in German—the Superman, in English.

We are not Christ in the same way that Clark Kent is Superman. Yet we *are*

Superman's body—Christ's body. Not *could be*, but *are*. The Church is the body of the Superman. Superman the Messiah is hidden there in weak, human flesh that looks like Clark Kent. "The mystery hidden for ages—Christ in us."

They crucified Him once 2,000 years ago, yet we wound Him over and over again . . . every time we ridicule, ignore, or abuse His body. Yet if we discerned His body broken, perhaps we could really see Him.

Think about it: Who is it that gets married to Superman? How about . . . Dana Reeve. Remember, she was married to Christopher Reeve, who played Superman in the movie. He was like a real life Superman until a broken neck stopped the messages between his body and his head.

So he was stranded in his body broken and weak. Christopher Reeve's first words to his wife once he could speak were these: "Maybe we should let me go." His mother and friends all agreed. Pull the plug. But his bride wept and then whispered, "You're still you, and I love you."

Jesus' body was weak and broken upon a cross. Almost all had deserted Him. But "there were many women there beholding him from a distance" (Matthew 27:55). I believe they were whispering under their breath, "But you're still you, and I love you."

- Who gets to be married to Jesus? The Bride of Christ.
- Who is the Bride of Christ? All those "who have loved his appearing" (II Timothy 4:8).
- How did He appear? Like Clark Kent hanging on a tree.

And now, when the Bride of Christ who is His Church wants to behold the body of her Groom, how can she see Him, hold Him, and love Him? Well, Paul tells us we *are* His body. Amazing!—Christ in us but touched in others.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was part of that dissenting church in Germany. He died a martyr's death April 9, 1945, shortly before his prison camp was liberated. In 1938, the year of Superman, he wrote *Life Together*, a book about Christian community in the Underground Church in Germany. He wrote:

God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word [Jesus] in the witness of a brother. The Christ in [a Christian's] own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother.

You see, I need a brother and sister to speak the words of Jesus to me. It seems stronger when I hear it from them than when I hear it out of my own mouth. I need a priest, and we are the priesthood of believers. We meet Christ in each other.

I've wondered, "God, why do you set it up that way? Why do I need the Church in order to know you, Superman? I'm your kid." And then I think of my kids. When they were little, they used to fight over me and my glorious presence. I was their Superman. Now that they're teenagers, it's a bit different. But Coleman used to

say, "I want to play with you, Daddy, but not Becky." And she's standing right there! I'd get furious and say:

Listen, mister, if you want to play with me, you'd better play with Becky! If you want to get to me, you're going to have to go through Becky. If you want to party with Superman, you'd better kiss your sister. Don't you dare hurt your sister dreaming of me.

Our God takes it one step further:

I'm *in* your sister, your brother. They are my temple. They are my body. Yeah, I have a personal relationship with you, but if you want to party with Superman, you've gotta dance with your sister, your brother, named Clark.

Have you been looking for Superman? Perhaps your dreams have been breaking His heart . . . because He's sitting right next to you.

Bonhoeffer wrote:

He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial.

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

How much do I thank Jesus for His body? And how much do I complain about His body? Ouch.

- With my dream of a church, I can crush the Church—the Body, the Bride, you.
- With their dream of Jesus, they crucified the real Jesus.
- With your dream of children, you can destroy your children.
- With your dream of a husband, you can destroy your husband or never meet your husband.
- With my dream of a bride, I can crush my real bride. But when I just make love to my bride, God does something amazing. He creates dreams. He creates life in her. We've even named some of the life: Jonathan, Elizabeth, Becky, and Coleman. Super! I could never have dreamed that super!

Stop ripping on the Bride of Christ with all your dreams. Make love to the Bride



and see what dreams God creates.

When you love someone, expect God to give you His dreams for them. But don't you dare go dreaming your dreams for that person until you love that person. Then God will give birth to dreams.

Well, my point this morning is love Christ's Bride, the Church. But more specifically, join a small group. A small group is at least two or three gathered in Christ's name. A small group is church.

And now I want you to understand you don't need Frances Eckhardt or Aram Haroutunian in your small group. You don't need anyone that looks like a spiritual Superman in your group. If you think you've got one, you'll probably be disappointed. You need to be looking for Clark Kent. I'm not just being cute; Superman is most exciting in folks that look like Clark Kent.

About fifteen years ago, I called a couple of old friends. Both of them were kind of computer geeks. One had lived at my house in high school and was like a brother to me. (You don't pick your brothers; they just show up.) One had been a friend since something like second grade. We were on the soccer team together. I said, "Let's form a small group." You see, the wonder is that I knew each of them as Clark Kent, yet Superman shows up.

I've watched one cast out demons and lead thousands to Jesus. His name is Andrew Trawick. I know he's a stinky, old minger . . . he was my roommate! The other leads your children in worship each weekend downstairs. Hundreds of your kids love Jesus and will go on to change the world because they saw Jesus in Mr. Parsons—my goofy friend Alan Parsons.

I love watching Andrew and Alan, because I think, "Wow! I *know* them, and they're homoio-pathetic. I *know* they're geeks and boneheads, and Jesus shows up!—kind of like Superman in Clark Kent.

And, you see, the greatest glory isn't His power in them but His *heart*.

I have Superman's phone number, so I can access his heart day or night, and He loves me. Jesus loves me through Alan and Andrew. Not a senior pastor dream of me, but *me*. That's the greatest gift to me, and then whenever a sermon does go well, they can say, "Wow! It's amazing what God can do with a homoio-pathetic, bonehead geek like Peter!"

If you're looking for Superman, He's all over this church. Rich Long is a part of our church. I see him every now and then sitting in the back. He ran the computer lab down at Columbine High School. (He's kind of a computer geek.)

After the Columbine shootings, he asked Gary, Aram, and me to come pray with him down at the school.

Rich told me that he had felt this miraculous peace at one point on that terrifying day in April, but now weeks later he wanted to pray over the horrifying memories associated with several locations in the school building.

You see, Rich had taught Dylan and Eric in his computer lab, and he was in the library that day in April.

So he took us to the library, still sealed off.

- He retraced his steps.
- He showed us where he first saw Dylan and felt this intense evil. He told us how he got some of the kids out of the library, leading them down the hallway, waiting for each to pass as bullets flew by.
- He described watching his friend Dave Sanders get shot through the back out his mouth.
- He showed us where he ran back and dragged Dave to a classroom. Rich presented none of this as brave or courageous. (Rich is unassuming, soft-spoken, and kind.)
- He then walked us to a room in the science lab where he had told a group of students to pile under a desk. Rich said he sensed evil like a presence filling the air.

That's when I said, "Rich, when was it that you felt the peace you were talking about?" He said, "Actually, that came all at once . . . when I covered the kids." I said, "You covered the kids?" He said, "Yeah, me and another teacher. We covered the kids with our bodies."

Now, you all realize bullets hurt bodies, right? Rich continued. "When I covered the kids, I felt someone covering me. I felt someone lie down on top of me and cover me. Then I had peace. Then we all began to pray."

We know who that was covering Rich, in Rich. It was the Superman. But make no mistake; He was there all along. In fact, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris had seen Him in computer lab; they just didn't recognize Him, because He looked like Clark Kent—Rich Long.

Rich would point out, "I don't know if I did everything right, and I'm still struggling." Well, that may be true, but Scripture is also true. Superman chooses to make His home in Rich Long . . . Alan Parsons and Andrew Trawick . . . the people in this room.

So, Lois, are you looking for Superman? Look around this room. See anybody in spandex and a cape? See anybody that looks like Clark Kent? Lois, where's Superman?"

On the night He was betrayed, the Eschatos Adam—Das Ubermensch—the Superman—Jesus of Nazareth took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body given to you. Take and eat." And in the same manner after supper, having given thanks He took the cup and said, "This is my blood of the covenant poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Eat and drink."

As people come forward for communion, Lois, ask yourself this question: Where's Superman? Christians have argued about how this is true, but Jesus said it: *my* body and *my* blood.

[Communion]

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So ask yourself: Where's Superman? "Well, I think I kind of saw him here in the Word, and then I saw him *here* crucified on a cross. Then he was *here*, body broken and blood shed on the table. And then . . . in all these stinky, geeky, strange people!" I'm not arguing in any way that the manger is not stinky. And I'm not arguing in any way that the

vessel is not earthen and dirty. But Jesus was born in a manger. There's treasure hidden in earthen vessels. "I watched them take *the* body and place it in *their* body." Do you think He's trying to tell us something?

I grew up in the Church and saw a lot of spiritual Supermen—you know, people who advertise themselves as spiritual Supermen. There's a place for folks like that. The body needs a mouth, so don't be too hard on them. But I've discovered that Superman is really most brilliant in those who look like Clark Kent. It's true.

Jesus said this to His very ordinary-looking disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo[is], I am with you always, to the close of the age.

(Matthew 28:28-20)

### Relevant Texts and Quotations (from bulletin)

But the people of the city were divided; some sided with the Jews and some with the apostles. When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them [Paul and Barnabas] and to stone them, they learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and to the surrounding country, and there they continued to preach the gospel.

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!"

Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them. But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.

~ *Acts 14:4-19*

Hey, Bob, Supe had a straight job even though he could've smashed through

Any bank in the United States. . . .

Well, he had the strength,

But he would not.

Superman never made any money

Saving the world from Solomon Grundy

And sometimes I despair the world will ever see another man like him.

~ *Crash Test Dummies*

I bring you a goal [cries his mouthpiece Zarathustra]. I preach to you the Superman. Man is something to be overcome. What have you done to overcome him? All things before you have produced something beyond themselves, and would you be the ebb of this great flood? Would you rather go back to the animal than transcend man? What is the ape to man? A jest or a bitter shame. And just that shall man be to the Superman, a jest or a bitter shame. You have traveled the way from worm to man, and much in you is still worm. . . . Lo, I preach to you the Superman. The Superman is the meaning of the earth.

~ *Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

In 1995, Christopher Reeve, the "Superman" actor, fell from a horse in a riding accident that severed his spinal cord and paralyzed him from the shoulders down. In the days which followed both he and his mother considered pulling the plug on his life support system.

In his new memoir *Still Me*, which recounts how he battled back from the accident, Reeve said he first shared his thoughts with his wife, Dana. "I mouthed my first lucid word to her: 'Maybe we should let me go,' " he recalled.

But his wife, through tears, persuaded him to fight back, saying, "I want you to know that I will be with you for the long haul, no matter what. You're still you, and I love you."

~ *Sherman Lee Burford, Leadership Journal*

And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!" There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom

were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Josès, and Salome.

~ *Mark 15:37-40*

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name. . . .

~ *Philippians 2:5-9*

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being”; the last Adam [eschatos Adam: “ultimate man” or “super man”] became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

~ *1 Corinthians 12:12-14; 15:44-49*

. . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. . . . To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

~ *Ephesians 1: 17-23; 3:8-10*

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.”

~ *1 Peter 1:22-25*

But God has put this word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. . . . He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure. . . . He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial. God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally a despairing accuser of himself. . . . If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even where there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on the contrary, we only keep complaining to God that everything is so paltry and petty, so far from what we

expected, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow according to the measure and riches which are there for us all in Jesus Christ.

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together

We are all asked to do more than we can do. Every hero and heroine of the Bible does more than he would have thought it possible to do, from Gideon to Esther to Mary.

~ Madeleine L'Engle

It may be possible for each to think too much of his own potential glory hereafter; it is hardly possible for him to think too often or too deeply about that of his neighbour. . . . Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses. If he is your Christian neighbour, he is holy in almost the same way, for

in him also Christ *vere latitat*—the glorifier and the glorified, Glory Himself, is truly hidden.

~ C. S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory

Would it be too much to say that, ever since the Ascension, Jesus has sought other bodies in which to begin again the life he lived on earth? The church serves as an extension of the Incarnation, God's primary way of establishing presence in the world. We are "AfterChrists," in Gerard Manley Hopkins's coinage:

. . . For Christ plays in ten thousand places  
Lovely in eyes, and lovely in limbs not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces. . . .

Ancient religions, such as the Roman paganism of Jesus' day, believed that the actions of gods in the heavens above affected the earth below. If Zeus got angry, thunderbolts shot out. Like kids dropping rocks off highway bridges onto the cars below, the gods rained cataclysm onto the earth. "As above, so below," went the ancient formula. Jesus, though, inverted that formula: "As below, so above," "He who listens to you listens to me." Jesus told his followers "he who rejects you rejects me. . . ." "We are a contemplative order," Mother Teresa told a rich American visitor who could not comprehend her fierce commitment to the dregs of Calcutta. "First we meditate on Jesus, and then we go out and look for him in disguise."

~ Philip Yancey, The Jesus I Never Knew

In the spirituality of the ancients, it was understood that the closer we draw to one another in community, the closer we come to Christ.

~ Dr. Bruce Demarest, Satisfy Your Soul

## Looking for Superman

Acts 14:1-19

Pastor Peter Hiett

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