I listened intently as the story-teller at Vacation Bible School this year asked our children who their heroes were. The children said people like Spider Man (naturally); they noted their parents were their heroes (that’s good); they said people like police officers (excellent). But when they were done I noticed with some sadness that none of them had mentioned any religious figure whatsoever. Even though the lesson was about BOLDNESS and was a Bible lesson about heroes from the Bible, none of the children mentioned any hero of faith. So in today’s sermon I ask –Who is your Hero? Because who your hero is, is who you will become. By contrast, I remember in growing up our opening exercises in Sunday School; I remember the metallic birthday cake where you plunked in your pennies, the number of years old that you were, and how all the pennies went to support missionaries overseas; I remember our teachers reading us letters from the Lorimers, who were our Presbyterian missionaries in Egypt, and how fascinating it was to me, in a way how heroic to go overseas and serve God in a foreign land; I remember dogging my parents for my allowance on Sunday morning, because I was to take 10% of it and put it into my Sunday School offering envelope and give it during opening exercises. I remember how proud I was that my offering was going to help support missionaries overseas. My weekly allowance, if I did all my chores, was a quarter, big money in those days. But I always put a nickel in my Sunday School offering envelope, more than 10%, because I was so enthralled with the idea that my money helped these mysterious and wonderful and heroic missionaries. I never met the Lorimers but they had captured my imagination. So who is your hero? Is even one of them a religious figure? What a sad, overly careful and complacent church we have become if none of our heroes even remotely are related to our faith, our Christianity, what we say we believe and hold dear in our heart...Maybe it’s because the church of Jesus Christ isn’t very BOLD anymore?????? That was one of my learnings from Vacation Bible School this year...

Our scripture verses from the New Testament book of Hebrews are all about heroes. The listing of heroes of faith begins really at verse 8 with Abraham and Sarah, but I am choosing to look only at verses 32-40. As it says, “through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.” (Hebrews 11: 33-34) Through their FAITH they were BOLD, BOLD, BOLDER Disciples. They were HEROES, HEROES, HEROIC to a fault. Through their FAITH and through a HOLY BOLDNESS they did things and said things and had things come about that made a profound difference in our world. Where is our HOLY BOLDNESS? Where is our faith? Who are your heroes and to whom are you to be a hero?????

As it says, “Women received their dead by resurrection. Some (women) were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise to a better life. Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. (These women) were stoned, sawn in two, they were killed with the sword... destitute, afflicted, ill-treated” (Hebrews 11: 35-37) Through their faith they were BOLD, BOLD, BOLDER disciples. They were HEROES, HEROIC to a fault. Through what they did and what they said they transformed the world more and more into the image of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Where is our HOLY BOLDNESS? Where is our world-changing FAITH? Who are your heroes? And to whom are you to be a hero? What young person would point to you and say –because of your FAITH you are my hero?????

We’ve become soft and complacent, hiding away in our beautiful cathedrals, speaking softly to a world, if at all, who needs to hear about Jesus and a LOVE that will transform it. We’ve become the Ladies Tatting Circle
at prayer. Gathering apart from the world, speaking only to ourselves, and having no influence on it. A little lapdog like Glory Glory Hallelujah, seeking to please its worldly masters, jumping up and down for a little treat every now and then. Careful, cautious, never raising our voice, never making a wave, never standing up for people, never boldly proclaiming the only truth that can set this world free. Where is our HOLY BOLDNESS? What young person would find that heroic? What young person would want to dedicate their entire life to become a minister or a missionary to that kind of church? Who is your hero? Who will you emulate with your life?

Just recently I have been reflecting about the 9 young people who have heard the call of God and gone into ministry over the course of the 35 years of my ministry. Eight of the nine all entered into ministry over the first 6 years of my ministry. We would take young people into all sorts of mission settings. They would see heroic and BOLD Christians living out their faiths firsthand. They went to places like Pakistan and Haiti, Appalachia and downtown, inner city Detroit and they saw what BOLD Christians of faith can accomplish in Jesus’ name. It was bold and edgy to go to Haiti in 1983. When I was younger and bolder and more foolish and less careful, it was then that young people committed their lives to follow Jesus wherever and however HE might lead. Now their hero is Spider Man.

I’d like to resuscitate the Ladies Tatting Circle a little. I remember going to the quilting ladies in Hickory and stopping in and saying Hi and every time they would ask me to put a stitch or two into a quilt they were working on. I would long demur stating that I didn’t want to ruin their quilt. Finally, I would with the utmost care put perhaps two little tiny stitches into the quilt. One day I said to one of the women, a particular character, “Lucy, I don’t want to ruin your beautiful quilt”. And she said: “Don’t worry; we take your stitches out as soon as you leave!” But those quilters quilted in order to sell those quilts and with the money support missionaries. The tatting and the quilting was done to support heroes of faith in their efforts. See, the problem today isn’t doing tatting. The problem today is that we think church is for us, what we want, to entertain us, and to provide religious goods and services for us and our children. The tatting, if you will, has become disconnected from its purpose. Its purpose, our purpose, is to go out into the world and to be and become Jesus for a broken world in need. Our heroic purpose is to live our faith in such a way, a way that is risky and edgy and BOLD, and that makes a profound difference for people and for the Lord. To be sure it can be in Lacroix, Haiti where destitute children with distended bellies from hunger come from mudfloor, mudbrick houses with no water and no power. But it can also be loving and ministering to that stumbling drug addict on Main Street in Washington.

Maybe we need to examine our lives of faith a little. And if we couldn’t say that there was even one young person who would look at us and point to us and say—“Those people are my heroes”—maybe, just maybe we think we’re following Jesus but we really aren’t. JESUS is my hero. He’s what propelled me into ministry. With a HOLY BOLDNESS He bled and died for a world in need. He didn’t count the cost. He didn’t play it safe. Our hero is the person we become. Maybe we need to set aside our pettiness, our legalisms, our wasteful gossipy dissipations, our small, self-centered agendas and follow HIM wherever He may lead. Maybe its risky to be a Christian. To follow Jesus. Maybe it really costs us something. Maybe that’s what the Book of Hebrews is reminding us. Where are our heroes? Where is our world-changing faith? Where is our HOLY BOLDNESS? What child would point to you and claim you as their hero? Amen and Amen.

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IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!