

I know from our Alexandria Lenten series two years ago that many of you are not Harry Potter fans. In fact, most of you have never read J.K. Rowling’s epic stories about a young boy’s coming to terms with life, which is to say, his discovery of who he is and his need to choose between good and evil.



You may not have been enthralled with Harry Potter, but a whole generation of now-adults were, and they will forever view the world through the lens of this tale.

I was reminded of this aspect of our culture this week, when a much younger friend posted online that he was “deciding how to use his superpowers this year.” We might say he was making his New Year’s resolutions, but in our post-Potter age, that’s not how he sees things. He knows that he has been given gifts (which is to say, he’s been given talents and abilities) that he can use, or not, for good or for evil, to help other people, or merely to perpetuate his own life and well-being at the expense of others.

My friend, by the way, is an administrative law judge in D.C. who funded his move here by winning on Jeopardy multiple times. In other words, he has considerable superpowers to use, or not, for himself or for others.

What superpowers do you have? How will you use them this year? Have you decided yet? How will you use your superpowers in this life? If you don’t yet know, you better get thinking and deciding (or always hold on to the handrail)!



Daniel Bonnell, The Baptism of Christ

I imagine that a young man from backwater Palestine, a young man named Jesus, might have been asking himself these kinds of existential questions when he sought out John at the River Jordan. WE know that Jesus had the ultimate superpower, that he bore the very essence of God. But did Jesus know this about himself, yet, on this day at this river?

A careful reading of Mark’s gospel suggests that “No,” Jesus became aware of his super-self as his life progressed, as he continually said “yes” to God. I won’t argue this point with you; the alternative could also be true. BUT, there’s no little-boy-Jesus in Mark’s gospel, or any authorized gospel, for that matter, resurrecting dead birds or animating clay figures. THOSE are made-up stories about what life as a boy-God-child might be like. You know, the made-for-TV version of adolescent Jesus, before television existed.

I think J.K. Rowling understood what Jesus' early life might have been like: like OUR lives, a dawning awareness that we have gifts, a dawning awareness that we can use our gifts for ourselves alone or for others, and the realization that we must make a choice between good and evil, that EVIL IS NOT A MYTH, and that refusing to speak evil's name somehow gives evil more power.

Jesus never flinched when confronting evil. But his confrontation began, somehow, according to Mark and the other gospel writers, when he arrived at the Jordan River. He came by choice. Like the rest of Jerusalem and Judea, including the spiritually hungry and the merely curious, Jesus came to hear what John the Baptizer had to say. And when John preached repentance and baptism for forgiveness of sins, of course Jesus the Christ chose to participate.

I wish I had a nickel for every word ever written about WHY Jesus, our sinless savior, needed to participate in a repentance ritual. "He was metaphysically washing away the sins of the whole world," my favorite explanation says. This is a great theoretical answer, and we could discuss for hours on end why, then, if Jesus' baptism cleansed the whole world of sin, did he have to die on the cross?

<long_pause> What we need is A REAL answer, not a theoretical one, for why Jesus chose to be baptized.

Here's a real answer: Had Jesus not stepped into the water, he would have been saying, "Look at ME, I'm sinless. I don't need to be baptized. But YOU do." Instead, he stepped in, let himself be dunked down under, knowing that HE didn't need repentance waters, but that WE DO. In other words, Jesus led the way for us, showed us the way. He chose living for us, not living for himself. He said "yes" to God, "yes" to good, "yes" to others, and "no" to self. Is there any wonder the heavens literally "split open," as Mark's gospel says, and thundered divine approval? Jesus was becoming aware of his identity as Christ, Jesus was using his considerable superpowers in the very way he was sent to do: to show us the way, and ultimately to create that way for us to follow.

We don't know whether Jesus knew, at that moment, that he would be required to make the ultimate sacrifice, to give his very life for all of mankind. I think not. I think our "yes" choices for good, our choices for God and for others lead us to bigger and bigger chances to use our superpowers in this way. In other words, today's steps of faith become training for tomorrow's bigger and bigger leaps of faith.

What's true for people who are faithful to Christ Jesus is also true for organizations. I'm thinking here of our own Church of the Resurrection. There was a time, when dedicating this building, that our beloved rector Jim Green declared if we ever ran out of money we would jettison the building in favor of helping others. Do you think that having THIS PRIORITY implanted in our very DNA is affecting

our priorities now? We haven't run out of money—far from it, but this priority, implanted deep within our culture, is definitely a factor in our decision-making processes today.

There was a time, for years and years in our history, when we gave away any money with which we were fortunate enough to end the year. The idea was that God would provide for us and, if not, we shouldn't continue to exist.

Thanks be to God and to you, we are going to end 2017 with a surplus without having to draw on any of the almost \$28,000 from savings that we had programed for operations. Are we going to give this money away? You betcha: it's going to buy food to feed our hungry neighbors through our food pantry. And this will help us manage the uncertainties of our budget for next year, because we were going to feed people first, as a priority.

I wonder what this act will become a training leap for, in our future? Can you hear the heavens opening? Can you hear the voice calling US “beloved?”