

Have you noticed how many heroes, or superheroes wear masks?

Like Batman that I watched on Thursday.

Or they are somehow unrecognizable to people. Like superman.



I know that both Ros and Kerry, in the last two weeks have pretty much resisted comparing our Bible heroes with the fictional superheroes of the comic books. But I can't resist this one similarity of anonymity.

Most real heroes also avoid recognition and fame.

Many appear out of nowhere, or perhaps a telephone box, or out of the night sky - do what they need to do then disappear again.

It is that trait that my choice of Bible Hero today shares.

He is a very secretive character, and someone who is revered and respected. He is almost hidden in the Bible in the depths of the book of Genesis with just the one mention there and one other in psalm 110, in the whole of the Hebrew scriptures.

A bit obscure? Certainly not a publicity seeker.

He pops up from nowhere and then disappears again into obscurity.

He is Melchizedek

- the name Melchizedek means "king of righteousness";
- then also, "king of Salem" means "king of peace."

He is noticed by two very astute followers of Jesus and co-workers of St Paul, they recognize him as an example, a precursor to Jesus and an example of someone of such faith in God that he didn't need an authorized religion to become a Champion for God, he didn't need to be ordained by a committee as an official representative and worship leader, he was around at a time when the only others to have a relationship with God were Abram and his family.

He is called "priest of God Most High" hundreds of years before the introduction of the idea of priests in the line of the family of Levi.

Almost, you might say, proclaiming **himself** in the roll because, I guess no one else was doing it and he saw a need and fulfilled it.

Those two astute people I mentioned are a married couple, **Priscilla**<sup>[a]</sup> and **Aquila**, first-century Christian missionaries described in the New Testament. Aquila is traditionally listed among the Seventy Disciples chosen by Jesus.. They both lived, worked, and traveled with the Apostle Paul, who described them as his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3).<sup>[1]</sup>



They are described as providing a presence that strengthened the early Christian churches. Paul was generous in his recognition and acknowledgment of his indebtedness to and Together, they are credited with instructing Apollos, a major evangelist of the first century.

It is thought by some to be possible, in light of her apparent prominence, that Priscilla held the office of presbyter an important church leader most surprisingly is thought by some to be the anonymous author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. That is where we find Melchizedek mentioned a number of times.

So really **Priscilla** and **Aquila**, are part of my hero trilogy today. If you can have a dynamic duo, why not a heroic trio.

The New Testament couple can be thought of as Melchizadek's publicists.

In the letter to the Hebrews they used the idea of a priest from outside the tradition, someone authorized directly by God for a special and particular task.

Melchizadek's roll was to bless Abram (who later became Abraham) in the name of God most high, offering bread and wine as a symbol, an action also used by Jesus 100's of years later and who also didn't wait to be raised up by the organized religion of his time. He just got on with what needed doing upsetting a lot of folk along the way.

I am not saying that we don't need our churches, organizations of worshipping communities, but I do think we need to remember that the real purpose of our faith is in having a personal relationship with God. Our church is useful, a tool to help and encourage us in establishing and growing that relationship but not the be all and end all. Something to be admired and respected – but never worshipped.

This evening we are having a service of confirmation when I think over 30 people from local churches will make their promises of commitment to God and will receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit of God from Bishop Tim. Individuals who have found or rekindled a relationship with God. It will be a part of a journey of faith walking alongside God through life.

I was reminded of this image of a lifelong journey of faith with God, on Tuesday when Hazel's son John read the poem *Footprints in the sand*, at her committal at the crematorium.



There are times in life when we feel closer to God than at others, there are times when we feel that god is right there speaking to us personally and others when god seems very remote.

That brief account of Melchizadek in the book of Genesis is a symbol for me of how close God can feel at times. So close that we may be bold enough to speak out, and take on a role in God's name that at any other time would seem outrageous.

We might also be reminded by the writings in the letter to the Hebrews that Jesus was outrageous for most of his ministry, because of his special closeness and relationship with God. Not least in those words we heard in today's Gospel reading *'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'*

The time that the Genesis reading takes us back to was a time when there was no structure for faith in the God we know today. Abram was in effect making it up as he went along so perhaps God knew that just at that moment he needed the encouragement of someone and that someone was this king and priestly figure Melchizadek who blesses Abram for his faithfulness and bravery.

We also at times need a Melchizadek as an encouragement in our lives or even sometimes we need to be a Melchizadek in someone's else's life.

Stay close to God!

**Amen**