

Reflection & Prayertime: Using our Power of One

October 19, 2020

In Luke 10:19, Jesus gives us the assurance that He has given us the power to overcome all the power of the enemy and nothing shall harm us. In Matthew 18, Jesus says, “Whatever we bind on earth, will be bound in heaven and whatever we lose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

It amazes me sometimes to think about how the intersection of two lives can impact one or both with such deep and long-lasting impact and assuming we have time I’ll ask you at the end of this reading to share if you’d like to the impact of a life upon yours or perhaps your impact upon another. I remember being in my first semester of college, studying nursing because I really had no clue what I wanted to do, and I accidentally bumped into a young woman, a stranger to me, walking to class one morning. She was so friendly that we struck up a conversation and told me about her major being special education and how she wanted to work with kids with learning disabilities and behavior disorders and how passionate she was.

I cannot for the life of me recall even her first name and wouldn’t be able to pick her out of a line up, but I couldn’t stop thinking about what she shared with me. By the end of that semester I had started taking classes that would fit for nursing or special education and by end of my freshman year had completely switched over to special education and felt in my groove. I knew nothing about church social work at that time which would become my ultimate groove. I doubt the special education department ever hired her as a recruiter but they certainly should have! She certainly “loosed” on me the joy of teaching!

My son Jordan volunteered when he was 16 and 17 tutoring kids in our Unity House family shelter and as an adult in his mid-twenties spent a couple years in the Peace Corp at dilapidated high school in Lushnje, Albania, and he has inherited the gene of being drawn to challenging kids. In the two summers he spent there he worked with his high school students as assistants to run summer camps for younger kids. He had no budget so had to be really creative with resources but his greatest resource was those teenagers and his own power of one to engage them in sharing their powers of one.

He received a message from one of the teenagers who worked in the camp that said: “Happy one year and 5 days camp anniversary. This is somewhat pointless

but I still wanted to write this. Once camp started in 2017 it felt like a dream come true in a way. I was not the best at making friends in real life and at camp I was able to socialize with new people whilst practicing and utilizing English for once that wasn't at school or on the internet. I had my fair share of awkward moments there but I cherish it, I made some great memories and it was an unforgettable time. I couldn't wait for it to begin once again next year. 2018 rolled around and camp was everything I thought it would be. I had a great time once again and enjoyed it just as much.

Summer is generally not that eventful for me. I don't have anyone to hang out with other than family and talking to friends on the internet. Camp made those weeks not go to waste. I can't really express in words how much these past two years have meant to me. Just interacting with the other volunteers and actually having a nice time, it felt great. I would've loved for there to have been another one this year but I still appreciate these past two years. Nostalgia takes me back there quite often. I want to thank you along with Peace Corp or whoever else was a part of making this possible, and I hope the future holds great things for you. Good luck on what's next whether it's in here or some other country.

Queen Esther is another person in the Bible that I think of when I think of the power of one. Her story reads like a novel with heroes and villains, romance, intrigue, drama. It's such an important story that those events are celebrated to this day by the Jewish holiday, Purim.

Esther is a beautiful young woman from the humble Hebrew people being raised by her uncle Mordecai after the death of her parents. Esther wins an extended beauty contest to become the next wife of Xerxes, the King of Persia, in a classic rags to riches story.

But the story is just getting started. Esther's uncle Mordecai draws the ire of a powerful leader named Haman – the King's second-in-command – because Mordecai won't bow down to Haman. In fact, Haman grows to hate Mordecai so much that he comes up with a plan to kill not just Mordecai, but all of the Hebrew people. But there's a twist! Neither Haman nor King Xerxes have any idea that Queen Esther is Mordecai's niece and a Hebrew herself.

Unaware, King Xerxes follows Haman's suggestion and orders the mass killing of the Hebrew people. But before the genocide can be carried out, Queen Esther intervenes in dramatic fashion, risking her own safety. She reveals that she herself is a Hebrew, and that Haman has led King Xerxes to destroy her people.

The tables turn quickly. King Xerxes is outraged that someone would want to harm his beloved wife. Haman is revealed to be the villain and quickly meets his own destruction. Mordecai, Queen Esther, and the Hebrew people are saved by the King's reversal of the order of genocide. A massive celebration ensues.

It's a dramatic, powerful story. But here is the truth I'd never considered before. King Xerxes' ability to look the other way at great injustice toward an entire group of people was quickly reversed only when he realized that injustice affected someone he cared about and knew personally. Nothing changed about the injustice. What changed was a relationship. We care about injustice most when it affects someone we know personally. We might not want it to be true, but it is.

The question here is – do I have personal relationships with those who are different from me? With those who may be affected by injustice that does not affect me?

Michelle Alexander in her powerful book *The New Jim Crow* highlights a question so simple yet devastatingly convicting, that it's continued to haunt me. The question is not whether mass incarceration disproportionately affects people of color. Alexander clearly lays out that evidence in her book. The question is: Do I care? And I would add to that as we consider King Xerxes, our ability to ignore injustice or look away would dramatically change if we personally knew...if we cared about someone from that community.

I have found this to be true. I always was against the evil power of the Taliban especially in regards to treatment of women, but it was abstract and out there somewhere. It became the most real to me when a young Pakistani dentist named Meena got on a plane to Louisville in 2014, knowing no one there, to escape Taliban threats because she'd worn a white jacket and treated men in her dentistry practice in Pakistan. Also because her mother, who is an OB/GYN physician, kept a baby girl whose existence was the outcome of a rape and who was unwanted by her mother. Meena's mother took in baby Gulalai as her own and is raising her, but the Taliban heard about this and according to Meena they expect all abandoned babies to be given to them, baby boys raised to be Taliban soldiers and baby girls to be teachers for the Taliban. The Taliban threatened Meena's mother, saying she owed them one female or the other and they would just take Meena.

A friend of mine got connected to Meena and asked if my husband and I would pick her up and bring her to an apple cider fest at their farm in New Albany since we lived downtown as did Meena.

I thought we were just giving a ride, but Meena invited us in for tea first and to sit and talk, and I realized it was relationship she wanted, not just transportation. And it's what I needed also. I taught Meena to drive and those 60 hours together help you get to know each other really well and have a lot of time to share. She was able to get permission to work and had her immigration interview 3 years ago in Chicago and I accompanied her although I wasn't allowed to sit with her in the interview.

At one point I became so concerned for her safety if she was deported back to Pakistan that I said to my husband that we should divorce and he should marry her, mostly joking but not completely. I asked her immigration lawyer some hypothetical questions around that possibility and it was of course not a viable solution to ensure her safety. The happy news is that Meena became engaged last month and this morning contacted me to ask me to officiate at her wedding. So actually I'll be the one to marry her, and to help her build a marriage foundation with a wonderful young man.

My friendship with her taught me that more than anything people need to experience the love of God, the affection of friendship, and the sustaining power of one that each of us has to give one another. But also as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "we are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."

Where have you seen your Power of One? Where have you used it to help others? How has someone else's Power of One sustained and restored you?

Marianne Williamson writes in her book *Return to Love*, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you NOT to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world."

And while being all those things is wonderful, I would broaden what she said to ask who are you not to help someone else be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, or fabulous or to escape injustice? I think this is a part of what we were created to do and endowed by our Creator to do – to recognize our own power of one and use it to amplify someone else's power of one. So play big this week with your awesome power of one, you child of God. Bring it on; share it. Thanks be to God.