

THE POWER OF ONE
Randall Tremba
August 31, 2014
22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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Exodus 3:1-15

Then the LORD spoke to Moses [out of a burning bush], *I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their slave masters. I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.*” And what is your name, asked Moses. And the voice answered: *I am.*

Moses discovered God to be a verb not a noun. Which is, I think, to say: Let’s just be together as one and see what unfolds.

Romans 12:9-21

So, said Paul. You want to live the life of the Spirit. Really? That’s great. Here are a few things you might do.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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This past week one of our elderly members went to a cemetery to place flowers on a grave. While she was there, something small but remarkable happened. She shared it with me in an email.

I wasn’t feeling up to par this morning, but I was determined to do my plantings at the cemetery. As I drove in I saw a man mowing grass. I was pulling weeds around the gravestone and was getting ready to dig when that man came over and said he’d help me. So he dug the planting holes for me. I tried hard to give him a tip and he simply would not take it. He even offered to get me more rich soil if I needed it. By the way, he was Hispanic. I came away wondering if an American would have done the same?

Which I take to mean, she was reassessing what she once thought of Hispanics in comparison to Americans. One person. One small act of kindness and look what it did.

That’s the power of one. One person. One kind act.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

These days there’s a lot of evil to overcome. The world it seems is teetering on the brink.

These days it’s hard to keep our chins up in the face of so much bad news. It’s hard to keep going. But there is a way and it is this: *Do the next good thing YOU can do.* Do whatever you can, wherever you can, for whomever you can and don’t worry about things you can’t do anything about. It’s OK to pray for global problems but don’t fret.

Pray globally. Act locally.

There is no one great thing to be done to fix the world. But there are many small things to be done with great love. The power of one act of kindness is enormous.

Aldous Huxley, author of *Brave New World*, put it this way near the end of his life: *It is a bit embarrassing to have been concerned with the human problem all one’s life and find at the end that one has no more to offer by way of advice than this: “Try to be a little kinder.”*

Our hearts ache, and rightly so, for the children lost, forsaken and abused on our nation's border. Some of us might be able to go there and bring some home; most of us can't. But all of us can pay closer attention to the children in our own neighborhood and community, some of whom are lost, forsaken and abused in other ways, running from hurtful situations.

Last Sunday, four of you signed up to be volunteers with CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), an organization that helps children at risk in the Eastern Panhandle find a safe place through the court system. Eight more of you signed up to assist children at academic risk in Shepherdstown Elementary School through the PASS or read aloud programs.

Keep doing those sorts of things. It's not everything. It's not something everyone can or should do. But it's something for some to do. It's the power of one person. It's the power of one kind deed.

Ebola is on the rampage killing people by the hundreds in western Africa. What can we do? Not much over there. But we can comfort those with debilitating and life-threatening illnesses in our own community. And many of you are doing just that.

That's the way. Keep doing that.

Global warming threatens the entire planet. We can't fix it by ourselves. But we can do something. For example, we can put up a few solar panels and shine a light on a safe, sustainable, alternative future for our children.

Several years ago, one of us had an idea. That idea grew into a conviction that spread into a small group. That spread through our church community and into the larger civic community. The power of one person. The power of one community.

This past Tuesday, a hundred people crowded onto the yard behind the church and marveled at 60 solar panels up on the roof and at the incredible journey that made it happen. Forty some grade school children from Shepherdstown Elementary came to witness that historic event.

After Than Hitt, Dan Conant and Julie Litwin spoke, it was my turn to say what it meant for our church. This is more or less what I said that morning to the sun-bathed audience.

Good morning. I am the pastor of SPC, which, I believe, now stands for: *Solar* Presbyterian Church.

These solar panels reconnect this church to an old and long Christian tradition of reverence for and connectedness with Mother Earth—a reverence sadly forsaken over the past several hundred years.

In the 13th century, St. Francis composed a long hymn of praise to Mother Earth, Sister Water, Brother Wind, and Sister Moon. But it begins this way.

*Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; you give light through him.
He is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, Most High, Brother Sun bears your likeness.*

This sun-powered project will make a lot of Presbyterians, living and dead, very happy. Let me explain.

The Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church was established in 1743, the year James Rumsey was born. Soon, steam power would be the talk of the town and the world. Today we're talking solar power.

These solar panels would make those founding 18th century Presbyterians very happy because, in case you didn't know, most of them were Scots and the Scots like nothing more than saving a penny.

Think Andrew Mellon, Andrew Carnegie or your Scottish uncle. These panels will save us many a penny.

As much as frugality, the Scots also love technological inventions.

Think Alexander Graham Bell and James Watt.

The Scots also love the natural world and work to keep it whole and holy. Think John Muir, son of a Scottish Presbyterian minister. So, you see, love of nature is in our DNA. At its best the Presbyterian tradition nurtures human oneness with the earth and all its creatures.

Every Sunday as part of worship a child of our church blesses animals, plants and a feature of the earth of his or her selection. Last Sunday, little Jordan Hughes blessed rivers.

And speaking of children, these panels would make a certain soft-spoken Presbyterian very happy. That certain Presbyterian wanted to create a safe world and safe neighborhood for children. And that would be? (Can you guess?) That's right—Mr. Fred Rogers, an ordained Presbyterian minister who, in the 1950s, saw the potential of television to nurture kindness in children.

As much as Presbyterians like frugality, invention, nature, and children, we also like being ahead of the times. Think Sally Ride. First woman into space. Also a Presbyterian.

And last but not least, there is John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian tradition. In the 16th century, Calvin challenged the status quo and conventional wisdom with ideas we now know as democracy—many kinds of people working together for the common good. Calvin became an early advocate of universal literacy and public education in order to promote the common good.

And that's what this solar project is ultimately about: the common good. For people, creatures and Mother Earth.

As happy as this project makes Presbyterians, I hope it makes our civic community just as happy and proud. For this project could not have happened without ecumenical and communal support.

And that's pretty much what I said last Tuesday to the assembled group.

No one can fix the whole world, but maybe you can knit a rainbow scarf. You can't fix the whole world, but maybe you can visit a shut in. You can't fix the whole world, but maybe you can make a meal for someone who can't. You can't fix the whole world, but maybe you can give someone a ride who can't drive. You can't fix the whole world, but maybe you can tutor a student who has fallen behind. You can't stop the violence in the Middle East, but maybe you can drop a festering grudge you hold another.

Long, long ago Moses thought he could fix his world by killing an Egyptian armed guard, who was brutally beating a Hebrew slave. That didn't work out at all.

Moses fled to the desert, into exile. In that time and place, he learned how to stop, look and listen. Forty years went by but a passion for justice kept burning in his heart like a fire that wouldn't burn up. And then one day, his heart spoke to him. Or maybe he just heard it for the first time. *Moses, it said, there is a way to save and deliver your people from misery.*

Are you ready, asked his heart. *I am,* said Moses. *I am. Here I am, Lord. I will go if you send me.* And so they went together as one.

For Moses it was a long trek back to Egypt—but it wasn't the other side of the world; it was his world, the one he knew.

For most of us, if not all of us, it's really not about the distance we travel; it's about the deed we do. It's not how far you go. It's going that matters. It's not about big things. It's about the power of one kind thing, letting the one light in your hand shine for others.

Here I am, Lord doesn't necessarily mean going to the other side of the world. Most often it means going to the other side of the room or the other side of a wall.

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HYMN

Here I am, Lord