

The Seattle Times had a front page article on July 1 about State Patrol Sgt. Kim Triplett and her struggle to get people to stop and help after an accident on I-405. “I basically stood in front of the cars until somebody got out.” She needed help in getting one of the victims out from under an SUV. The Times report said that many just drove through the accident scene as if “were an obstacle course.” We don’t want to get involved or help. We want as little interaction as possible with those in need. Helping others is not a high priority on many peoples list.

The 2nd day theme for our Power Lab VBS is: **Jesus gives us the POWER to help others.** Now I am not fond of the use of the word “power” but I know it goes with the theme. I would prefer conviction or desire, or love – to help others. Why? For me, power gives the connotation of the stronger helping the weaker. I see Jesus giving us the POWER to walk beside, give a helping hand to or work together with other people. I see it as a mutual helping of one another when there is a need.

Another Seattle Times article a few weeks ago, shared the plight of an area clergyman who needed help in transplanting a crop from one field to another. I cannot remember the exact crop or situation, but he was in need of “helping hands” to move the crop so that it would have a better chance of growth and survival. The crop will be used to provide fresh food to help feed those in need. He needed people who would be willing to work alongside him in the process. Did you know he is an Evergreen pastor? Seeking those who would be willing to “plant alongside him.”

James Kennedy in his book, What if Jesus had Never Been Born? points out the contributions that the church and Christianity have made to the world. The world is a different place today because of the caring, helping power of the church in the world. We have hospitals, orphanages, care for the elderly or young, etc. because of the work done by Christians. He notes that 122 of the first 123 colleges or universities established in this country were started by Christians. The only exception was the University of Pennsylvania and that had the influence of Evangelist George Whitefield. Schools like Harvard, Yale, William and Mary, Dartmouth and many others have strong Christian roots.

Do you know why the Sunday School was founded? It began not as a way of teaching Christian education, Bible stories. It began as a way to teach the young children who worked from Monday through Saturday in the mills and factories how to read and write! Now it may have used Bible stories to accomplish this but the goal was to teach these young children how to read and write, something they would never be able to do working long, hard hours in the factories.

As we journey around the world with our American Baptist Missions we find that we have extended a “helping hand” by empowering nationals to do the job. In the Philippines it was American Baptist’s who began the first nursing school for Filipinos. We have made our impact on much of the world by caring for and helping others. We have changed our world because we care enough to walk beside and to help others by teaching them. We have been empowered by the living Christ.

Jesus and his disciples are walking down the road and they pass a man “born blind.” Now the concern of the disciples is not about helping this man; they have a

theological question: “Whose sin made this man blind?” They are more concerned about the cause of his blindness than about the man. Jesus responds, “No one.” Our concern should not be about the cause but for the one who is afflicted. Jesus spits on the ground, makes some mud and covers the man’s eyes with it. His instructions are for the man to go to the pool of Siloam and wash. Following the instructions of Jesus the man can now see. For the first time in his life he is able to see his world, God’s world.

Of course, as one would expect, this causes furor among the religious leaders of the day. They hold a “trial”, or so it seems. They want to get to the bottom of this healing. They have ignored the man as long as he has been blind but now that he can see, now that he is restored to community, he becomes an issue. They even call his parents to testify; they want to make sure that he has been blind since birth. They have to make sure this is not some hoax. And then they ask who caused this to happen. Imagine asking a blind man about the accident that just happened in front of him. He does not know who this was, he only knows that he was once blind and now he can see. The result of his healing, his sight being restored—he is expelled from the Synagogue. They did not care about his blindness, only his sight, and this was now a problem, so you get rid of the problem.

The power of this story for me is how Jesus seeks to open the eyes of the disciples to the need. He is not concerned with the theological issues, just the need of this man born blind. Jesus opens our eyes to the needs around us. The tragedy is that our eyes are still closed to the needs in so many parts of the world. For example, there are still places where young women are denied an education. A news story this week told of a woman who is in Afghanistan teaching young women to read and write. The story told how her life is in danger daily because there are those who do not see the need of teaching young women to read and write. This is repeated in many parts of the world today—Jesus is seeking to open our eyes to the needs around us. The American Baptist Woman’s emphasis for the year is “breaking the chains” of women and young girls sold into sexual slavery. They are seeking to open our eyes to the needs in so many parts of the world. We still have the POWER to help others, to have our eyes opened.

Yet, we often fail to see. We pass by not wanting to get involved. We, like the disciples, would rather raise theological questions than help. We may see the need as too overwhelming and thus we do nothing. However, God only asks us to do what we can.

Jesus gives us the POWER to see the need and do what we can. For us at FBC/MLT it is the development of an after school literacy program (moving back to the reason for Sunday Schools). We have located a need, discovered that there are resources to help us meet that need and are now in the process of developing a program for this fall. Our eyes have been opened to the need and we are being empowered.

Now we will not change the whole world. But who knows—what if one of the young men or women we teach to read discovers how to solve our energy crisis? John Shore has written a wonderful little book, [Penguins, Pain and the Whole Shebang, why I do the things I do, by God](#). He has one of the most powerful and poignant passages I have ever read (at least for me). God, through John, writes:

Now I want to tell you something that I think might sound a little...well, I have no idea how it might sound. Obnoxiously self-serving, probably. But here's a truth: You would not believe how much of what is now considered an "act of God" could be prevented or radically mitigated if everyone down there on Ol' Blue Skies would pool their resources and start working together, instead of spending so much time and energy working against one another.

The human race has so much more power than it realizes. You're all about one discovery away—from something like, say, how sound waves can be compressed and harnessed to interact with matter—from practically putting me out of a job.

I'm serious. If everyone on earth, right now, began truly adhering to the "One for All, and all for One!" creed, in about twenty years you'd be living in a world so different from the one you're in right now you'd think you were on another planet.

Which, come to think of it, you could actually be.

In other words, no fair complaining about what you can't do before you've done everything you can. No fair throwing up your hands, when rolling up your sleeves is all that's needed. If you can't grasp something maybe it just means you haven't opened up your arms wide enough.

A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

A stitch in time saves nine.

A penny saved is like a dime earned after taxes.

A babbling God is better than no God at all.

And then the phrase that haunts me and challenges me:

What I'm saying is this: there was a little boy in Ethiopia who would have cured cancer, if only he hadn't died of starvation.

Kennedy, James, What if Jesus Had Never Been Born?, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994
Shore, John, Penguins, Pain and the Whole Shebang, Seabury Books, NY, NY 2005 (pp.67-68)