

First Place Winner. MLK Essay Contest 2020



No Person Too Small

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Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. changed America by inspiring the disenfranchised.

Many blacks did not believe they could overcome racism. Such pessimism inadvertently helped Jim Crow laws, because blacks feared that reforms would lead to violent retaliation.

Dr. King, however, illustrated to ordinary citizens that they were not too small to create change. MLK challenges us to do good whenever we can, no matter the inconvenience. Even if the cause of a dilemma is out of our control, we can improve any situation.

Rev. King's faith energized his activist mindset. In one of his sermons, King tells congregants that for "religion to be real and genuine[, it] must not only be something that men talk about[,] but something that men live about." King recognizes that some things are outside of humans' control, as "God...guides the destiny of the universe." Yet, he calls on us to follow God's "inexorable moral law" in whatever way we can. Those who do not believe in a god are still asked to make the world a better place.

Rev. King laments that the goodwill of modern Christians is a "mere Sunday habit," rather than a 24/7 instinct. Indeed, doing good is difficult outside the church because, according to MLK, "man's quest for the divine is interrupted by the nagging movements of the demonic." However, King excuses neither immoral action nor moral inaction. He argues that "we are forever attempting to find some scapegoat on which we cast responsibility for our actions."

While King recognizes the consequences of negative circumstances on one's life, he believes that "[our] personal response is the final determining factor in our lives."

When we avoid the right decision, we must take ownership of our dereliction.

In King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail, he writes that "the ultimate tragedy...was not the brutality of the bad people, but the silence of the good people." We all consider ourselves

“good people,” so we should behave like so. When we encounter choices that juxtapose what is difficult with what is convenient, we must choose the difficult.

When we see the elderly struggling to carry something, we must offer to alleviate their burden. When we see somebody at lunch sitting alone, we must offer them company. When we see family members seized by addiction or sorrow, we must offer our support.

The blind eye we turn to suffering is replaced by the eye of the devil; he is always looking for opportunities to spread misery and evil.

Rev. King calls on us to keep our eyes open for moments to spread mercy and grace.

He does not expect us to walk a million miles. He expects us to walk one. While that mile may seem insignificant to us, the effort can change somebody’s life.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. teaches us that none of us is too powerless to make a difference.

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