

**“The Power of One”**

*Presented to the congregation of the Metropolitan Community Church of Winston-Salem  
March 6, 2005  
11:00 am and 6:00pm*

**Scripture Readings**

*Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians Chapter Three Verse Twenty-eight:*

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*

*The Gospel According to Saint Luke Chapter 18 Verses One through Eight:*

*Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for the people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my opponent.’ For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, ‘Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them.*

**The Sermon:**

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses to the door of Wittenburg Church there would have been no way for him to know how his actions would affect the rest of the world’s history or its people.

It is much the same with us. For gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons our activism, our work for civil equality seems, sometimes, to be unnoticed. For many, we may feel as though our work is not accomplishing any good or that we are not being heard, or like the woman in our Gospel reading, that we are not being treated justly or receive our due justice from the world. But all of these feelings could not be further from the truth. Even though you are but one person, this does not mean that you cannot receive justice or equality or change what you know to be wrong in our world. Just like the woman in our reading, justice is attainable and God has given us this promise.

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Martin Luther was but one person, but with his actions, his fight, his brave stance against the Church of his time, he changed the world. It is amazing how the actions and beliefs of one man can affect not only the history of the world, but the lives of millions of people and their own personal experiences and relationships with the supernatural, awe-inspiring force that we call God. But of course Luther did not do this by himself. Luther prayed constantly to God for help and guidance, but most important: He never lost heart.

Martin Luther did not come to know that he had changed the lives of others immediately. It would not be until 1521, four years after he posted his 95 Theses, that he would travel across Germany headed towards Worms for a trial in front of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. On his way, Luther would encounter many villagers and many city people. They gave him food and gifts. When he arrived at Worms, he was welcomed to the city in a fashion similar to Christ's triumphal entrance to Jerusalem. From his personal writings we know that this was the time and this was the place where Luther would first realize the grand impact he had had on people's lives.

I have been working for equality since I was 14 years old and, at times, I do not see how any of the things I have done have come to change anything. I think that this is the same for many LGBT persons. We are asking, begging praying for justice, we aren't losing heart, but yet we do not see the justice that we strive for. My chorus director at Reynolds High School once told me that the people who make change do not immediately see it themselves. The reason that the movers and shakers of the world find it hard to see what they have changed is because many of those changes are made within people's hearts and minds.

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Of course, all of us here know that the best way to make a change is to create personal relationships. Within our relationships with other people, we have the chance to change people's hearts and minds. We have the chance to show the community, one person at a time, that LGBT people are no different than anybody else. But in today's time and place, word of mouth and person to person change isn't always the most effective way to initiate action.

The biggest catalyst of Luther's movement was not even contained within personal relationships. If it had been, the Protestant Movement probably wouldn't have gone much further than Luther's own, small province in Germany. If any of you here work with students, whether college students, like myself, or elementary, middle or high school students, then you know first hand how much of a pain we can be and also, how much of a blessing we can be. It was the same for Luther. His students at Wittenburg University took his 95 Theses, printed them up on the brand new Gutenberg Printing Press and sent them across Europe. Luther's movement was one of mass media, granted a very primitive form of mass media.

As a community, we need to branch out. We need to network and remember that we are not here alone. The early Christians did the same; setting up churches and Christian communities throughout the world known to them. Yesterday, I attended Equality NC's Statewide LGBT Leaders Summit. Leaders from across the state were there and more than 60 organizations were represented. We need more meetings like this one, we need more networking opportunities and most importantly, we need to take them seriously. But the LGBT community's only problem within our present world does not only revolve around politics. There are so many things that go hand in hand with each

other, so many things that are influencing people in our world. Religion, tradition, and, perhaps, the prudish, and some would say Puritanical, nature of America are keeping us from achieving what we know we should have the right to. They are keeping us from receiving our justice.

During the past election season I watched with fervor the news of the different campaigns. I stay tuned for news specifically about gay rights issues. One thing that kept popping up in my mind was religion. Like the great majority of people here today, I had to struggle personally with my sexual orientation. According to what I was taught as a child, my sexual orientation was directly against God. But now I know that my homosexuality has nothing to do with God's love for me. He (or whatever our Supreme Being and maker may be) loves me anyway. I know that and you know that. But how many Americans know that? How many people know what we know? How are we going to help people understand what we know to be the truth?

Those are the questions that we should be asking. Those are the questions that really matter. I know that I speak for a lot of youth and even adults when I say that I am tired of my rights and my life, and my justice, being fought over by a bunch of white, wealthy, straight over 40 politicians in Washington, Raleigh or the City Hall Downtown. I am tired of waiting. I am getting weary of praying ceaselessly and never losing heart. That is hard to do. But how long does it take for a people to understand that when you say "all men were created equal" it means ALL men and women, white and black, gay and straight, American and non-American?

That is the way that a lot of people feel but that is not what is going to change America. I go back to my opening idea: One person CAN make a difference. Martin

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Luther did, Rosa Parks did, Martin Luther King did, along with a host of many other people. Try telling Judy Shepard that her son, her one child didn't make a difference even in death. We need to get out and start getting to know people. We need to come to understand what makes people be turned off from the idea of equal rights. I don't mean that you need to know what they think. We already know what they think. Get to know *why* they think that way. Get to know the exact reasons why. When we come to truly understand others, we will start making change. When members of the Religious Right come to know some good Christians that just happen to be gay, maybe their hearts can be changed. Once they come to understand that just because some one is gay, it doesn't make them a bad person, it doesn't make them a predator, it doesn't make them evil. And more than getting to know our opponents, we need to know ourselves and our own political and social allies. This goes back to the all important: Networking, Networking, Networking.

I think that one thing that seems to be hurting our movement is our dependence on current laws and legal challenges. Do you really think that we can achieve any progress within the law when the people who make the laws are against us? Do you really think that attacking them with one lawsuit after another is a good strategy? Is it what God would want us to do? When Jesus had a problem or wanted to make a point or wanted to change something about His world, what did He do? He talked. He went to where the people were and He talked to them. He changed people's hearts and minds and souls by getting to know them, showing them unconditional love and showing them an alternative. If you want an example of how one person can make a difference look at Jesus. Out of all the men and women in the history of the world, He has got to be the epitome of how

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some one can make change. Jesus certainly changed the world and He did so by talking and getting to know others. And further more, every person who has ever made significant change in this world has had this in common: They prayed ceaselessly, never losing heart, putting all of their faith in God and in God's promise that justice would one day be granted.

So this is my challenge. To the youth: When you go back to school, don't let anger and vengeance get your way of making change like I sometimes let happen. If someone says something or does something offensive or inappropriate, talk to them. Be polite and show them the type of love Jesus would. To the adults: I say do exactly the same thing. Talk and get to know your oppressors. Once they know you as a person and not just the "gay guy" or "lesbian woman" they might be less likely to be so oppressive. If this can happen, I can assure you that America will change. Somewhere along the way, our movement will get a push like Luther's did when his students published his 95 Theses, but until then all we can do is live according to the highest standards, according to the ways in which we were taught to live by Christ. We must never lose hope and we must keep our faith in God steadfast and strong.

One day God will come to us and speak to us like he spoke to the widow of our Gospel. He will tell us, "Your justice has been granted." And I know this is true, because Jesus promised us that it would happen. So never lose hope, trust in God with all your heart, all of your mind, and all of your soul. Our justice, through the Glory of the God and the Holy Sacrifice of our Saviour Jesus Christ will surely come. AMEN.