
Holy Hacks: March 20, 2020

By the Rev. Julia Mitchener

Little Victories and How We'll Make it Through

We do not have to do great things, only small things with great love.
—Mother Teresa

The other morning, I experienced a tiny victory. I went to the pharmacy to pick up some medicine for my son, who has epilepsy. My husband had tried to get the prescription filled the night before, only to be told to come back “first thing tomorrow.” So there I was the next day, stating my son’s name and date of birth. To which the pharmacist replied, “I’m sorry, it’s not ready.” I persisted, noting that we had been promised the meds as soon as the store opened. The pharmacist shook his head and began a spiel that I suspect he has now given literally hundreds of times: “With the virus . . .”

I didn’t even hear the rest of what he said, because a small battle had begun raging inside me. At the base of my skull, I could feel a rush of hot air as an explosion built. At the same time, I looked at this man with bloodshot eyes and unkempt hair who had probably been pulling double shifts for a week. This wasn’t his fault. It wasn’t anyone’s fault. I took a deep breath and managed to squeak out, “Thank you. I understand. I’ll come back later.” With what appeared to be genuine relief, the pharmacist wished me a nice day.

I share this anecdote not to congratulate myself. Far from it. Later that afternoon, during the aptly named “witching hour,” I got back on my broom with a vengeance and flew sky high for several hours, nagging at my kids to pick up their toys, guilt-tripping my husband for taking a walk in the park all by himself, snapping at my uncle for bemoaning the cancellation of the NCAA tournament, and yelling at a dog we don’t even have. In short, I went back to my same old controlling, judgey, heavy-handed, *I’m fine, but what’s wrong with you?* self. Here’s the thing, though: It didn’t get me down quite as much as it had the day before or the day before that. I didn’t feel quite as bad about myself or about the situation we’re all in. Why? Because I remembered the person I had been able to be that morning, the person who, with God’s help, I knew I could be again. I reminded myself that I am not required to be perfect and that no one can be calm, upbeat, and kind hearted all the time, especially during a global pandemic. I can have my crazy moments. But I can have my sane and loving moments, too.

How are we going to get through this? Surely we’ve all been asking ourselves this question, especially as the news from Italy has become more grim and the Imperial College in London has published its alarming statistics. It can be pretty overwhelming. *How are we going to get through this?* My experience at Walgreens reminded me that we’ll do it one step at a time. And not just one step. One deep breath at a time. One kind act at a time. One snuggle with a frazzled child at a time. One whispered prayer in the middle of the night at a time. One shrug at the empty shelves that used to hold toilet paper at a time. One walk on our own in the park at a time. One phone call to an elderly neighbor at a time. One letting ourselves and everyone else off the hook at a time.

In between these moments when our better angels prevail, there will be plenty of times we’ll regret. Plenty of times when we will yell at our spouse, our children, the pharmacist, the television, Publix. Plenty of times when we will forget to breathe. Plenty of times when we will gloss over the fact that people are dying and will wallow instead in the misery of our own cancelled vacation plans. Plenty of times when we will lose it over toilet paper —toilet paper! Plenty of times when we will feel like giving in to despair. And that’s all right. That’s normal. We are forgiven. We are accepted. We are loved. We are loved by a Love that will never let us go. Not just at those times when we’ve got it all together, but even at those times when our children catch one glimpse of us and run away because clearly we have gone crazy and are coming for them. Even at those times. Especially at those

times. We are loved. We are held. We are enough. And we will get through this, one small victory at a time.

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