

MARCH 16, 2026 DEACON MICHAEL CARRERA

You know, friends, I heard a story a couple of years ago that I was captivated by. Isn't that a good word? To be captivated by something, so much so that it draws you in and maybe, just maybe, changes how you look at things.

Well, in this story, there was a man who did some not-so-good things, so he spent some time in prison. Now, while he was in prison, he began to read scriptures, and he had a conversion of heart. You could say that the Lord took his stony heart and gave him a heart of flesh.

Now, he made a promise to himself that when he is released from prison he would go back to his hometown and he would spend some time each day, preaching and teaching about Jesus. When he was released from prison, he did exactly that, and for years, he could be seen on the streets speaking about Jesus to anyone who would listen.

Well, there was this young boy who became a young man over the years, and he had heard this man over the years. And one day, he was riding his bike and he stopped in front of this man, and he said to him, "Sir, all these years, I have been seeing you speaking about Jesus to anyone that would listen. But have a look around. The world has not changed. Why do you continue to do so?"

And the man said, "Well, you see, boy. I don't speak about Jesus to anyone who would listen to change the world, for only God can change the world. I do so so that the world does not change me."

So you see, friends, we may fight it, but the world does change us, does it not? Yes, of course it changes us. And many of us remember a time that we had a heart of flesh, when it was easier to welcome the stranger. It was easier to turn the other cheek. But then something happened over

a number of experiences, the world brought us to our knees, and slowly, we could feel our heart of flesh becoming a heart of stone.

Now, of course, none of us want this. And so we pray to the Lord, we plead to the Lord. And like the psalm we just heard, we say, "I will praise You, Lord, for You have rescued me." Yes, friends, it is only the Lord that can rescue us, and as the man pointed out in the story, it is only the Lord that can truly change the world.

And as we heard in our opening prayer, the Lord has—has an eternal design to renew the world. Well, what is this eternal design? We need only look any further than our first reading, where Isaiah prophesizes that there will be a new heaven and a new earth where everything of old will no longer be remembered. Yes, friends, there will be a time of complete restoration.

But have a look around. We are not there yet. So what do we do in the meantime? Well, friends, we do not have the power to change the world, and only God can rescue us, so maybe like the man in the story, we have the power to stop the world from changing us.

Well, how do we do that? Well, in our first—in our opening—our opening prayer, we heard that we need to—in our gospel affirmation, that we need to seek what is good, and avoid what is evil. Well, how do we do this? Is it possible? Of course it is possible, because it's in our scripture, so we know that it is possible. But if it's possible, why do we find it so challenging?

Well, friends, I believe because many of us have a "go big or go home" mentality, where we believe that we have to do these big spiritual tasks or these big spiritual prayers to maybe change the world, or simply to change our families. And then when we do these efforts and we see very little progress, we get discouraged.

So instead of having a "go big or go home" mentality, maybe we could have a "start small but stand tall with God" mentality. You see, friends, that is what we see in our gospel passage today. Here Jesus's reputation as a divine healer was beginning to spread, and there was this royal official whose son was not doing too well, so he went to Jesus and said to him, "please come and heal my son."

Well, Jesus looked at him and said, "You will not believe unless you see signs and wonders." In essence, Jesus was saying to him, "you have a 'go big or go home' mentality." And then the royal official really doubled down and said, "Jesus, please come or my son will not live." And then Jesus said to him, "Go. Your son will live."

And friends, here is the important part. Here is the captivating part. We read in our gospel that the man believed what Jesus said. Yes, yes, he had—he started small, but he stood tall with the Lord. And only afterwards, as he began to go home, did his workers come to him and say that his son's fever had left him.

And then the royal official said, "When did this happen?" And they said one o'clock in the afternoon, and he remembered that that was the time that Jesus told him that his son would be healed. And then that further strengthened his faith and the faith of his entire household.

You see, friends, he started small, but stood tall with God. And then he saw the signs and wonders. And so, friends, we are asked to do the same thing. We cannot change the world, but maybe we can stop the world from changing us. And yes, and in doing so, the Lord can use us as conduits of love and mercy, forgiveness and hope, where we can co-create with Him to truly change the world.

I have a friend of mine who tells me a story that when her kids were young, she used to put them in the minivan and drive out on the road and

there was a man—there was a woman who used to work with them who would stand on the porch and she would look at the children as they left in the minivan, and she would simply make the sign of the cross. And then my friend and her children, who were in grade school at that time, would do the exact same thing.

Such a small gesture, and yet to this very day, these children are now adults in their 20s and 30s, they remember this as a fond memory of their childhood, and something that concretely solidifies their faith.

Friends, if we do these things, even the smallest of things, in time, we may find a restoration of things. Yes, where the Lord takes our stony hearts, He rescues us and gives us a heart of flesh. As yes, as we wait, we wait for joyful hope, for the coming of the new heaven and the earth.

And friends, if we do these things, even the smallest of things, on a daily basis, maybe once again if we haven't been for a long time, but yes, maybe once again, we too, you and I, will once again be captivated. There is that word again. Yes, we will be captivated by the word of God. We will be captivated by scripture. And it will draw us in. Yes, draw us in in such a powerful, powerful magnitude. Draw us in with the power of God's grace. That maybe, just maybe, it will change how we look at things.