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## Power for Good

by John and Sylvia Ronsvalle  
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Here is a true story.

Sylvia was attending to a matter in the Clothing Room when another staff person came in from outside. "Those boys just jumped your fence."

Sylvia was out the door in a flash. Some boys, probably these, had jumped her fence once too often. The lily stalks left up for winter decoration had been broken. And the lavender in the corner was smashed. (Who knew Sylvia would ever care about garden flowers?!)

No coat on this winter day, Sylvia ran (and then walked fast and then huffed and puffed) the three blocks as the boys refused to stop. Fueled by increasing anger, she followed them all the way into the Boys and Girls Club where they had gone in (by now, some time before her arrival).

The staff person was most helpful and very concerned. Yes, she knew who had just come in from the description, and she called them down.

Sylvia was winded and darn-tootin' mad that the boys had refused to stop. She did not doubt that these guys were the ones who were routinely jumping her fence. Living next to empty tomb has some nice advantages. But it placed her garden in a direct path between a housing project and the Boys and Girls Club. And she thought only a ten-year old would jump a fence for the fun of it, rather than walk beside it through a non-fenced area.

The boys came to the foyer where Sylvia was waiting, and at first denied they had jumped the fence. But when Sylvia mentioned the broken lily stalks, one said, "Oh those were dead anyway so it didn't matter we broke them."

Oo-oo-oo-h that attitude was not what a winded middle-aged lady with no coat wanted to hear after a three-block chase in the cold. "You have no right to be in my yard. That's private property." And as she went on, one boy looked at the ground, another turned his back (and the staff person made him turn around), and a couple others looked defiant.

In that moment, Sylvia felt something (the Holy Spirit?) tell her to back off. Surprisingly, she did. She stopped in mid-sentence. This was no way to care about these boys.

You know that verse that says not to worry, that God will give us what to say (Mt. 10:19)? Well, she stopped a minute and then in a much lower voice went on. "Look, I spend a lot of time in the garden. I just want it to look nice. You have the power to do good. I'm asking you to use that power to help me keep my garden the way I want it."

There was a change in the boys' faces. They really looked like they were listening.

This is not a pretty story. Losing one's temper so much that you huff and puff three blocks to yell at someone is not really the way to glorify God. But as is usual, God can even use our weak moments.

And the idea of "power for good" has stuck with us. We often think of power as a bad thing. "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Machiavelli is famous for his book on how to wield power, sometimes in sleazy ways. Some Christians talk about a "journey into powerlessness." Most people don't want others to have power over them.

But what about power to do good? What about the fact that Jesus said we'd be clothed with power from on high? (Luke 24:49)

We all have power and are using it every day. The way we spend our time, the way we spend our money, the way we relate to other people all reflect our use of power. We can speak to someone in a way that makes him feel better about himself. Potential giving at 10% on a congregation-wide basis could help stop, in Jesus' name, global child deaths. The food or furniture we deliver, the home we repair, the clothes we sort can not only meet a need but also tell someone, "You are loved in Jesus' name." Power is being displayed.

In John 10:18, Jesus announced that no one was taking his life from him, but he was laying it down. Jesus denied the world's power, but he definitely affirmed his power to do good. And Jesus' use of God's power continues to save and transform us today.

What about those boys? Well, we'll never know if they began to understand they had power for good, or if it was the stern talking-to they were receiving from the Boys and Girls Club staff person when Sylvia left. But no more lily stalks have been broken.

Have fun for Jesus today, using power for good.