“If I cannot do great things, I can do small things in a great way.” —MLK

Revolutions don’t begin with a bang; they rise from a spark. Changing the world is not an easy task, nor is it a fast one—in fact, it’s a result that very few can claim. But our modern conceptions of “world-changing” are not always a healthy outlook on the future. An action doesn’t have to affect millions or even thousands of people in order to improve life. Changing the world starts small: it starts with carrying someone’s groceries or picking trash off the ground or volunteering in a nursing home. These small actions may not earn us international renown—not everyone can achieve fame, and recognition shouldn’t be the goal of our actions. Our aim should be to help people, even in the smallest of ways.

For the past three autumns, I have canvased the community for nonperishable goods to donate to a local soup kitchen. Although I do not have the resources to make grand donations, nor the time to volunteer as much as I would like, I know that my contribution matters because my actions are mirrored by many other members of my community. Together, our small alms accumulate to have great effect on the homeless and hungry of my city, who might not otherwise be able to have a decent Christmas meal.

Dr. King’s dream was for the dignity of all people. This cannot be achieved without small steps, such as refusing to relinquish your seat on the bus. Dr. King himself did not begin his campaign on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial; he began it in the streets and in a jail cell. By starting his journey with small but passionate actions, Dr. King was able to do great things.

This quote carries hope. I might not be able to change the world, but through meaningful small actions, I can change my world and the worlds of those around me. I can use Dr. King’s words to honor his life and achievements by focusing my energy on the minute details, instead of wasting my efforts on impossibly large tasks. I don’t need to be the face of the revolution to make a difference; I just need to help fan the spark.