

It's a Beautiful day in the Neighborhood, It's a Wonderful day for a neighbor, ...

Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Please won't you be my neighbor.

It's a Neighborly day in this beautywood, a neighborly day for a beauty....

Would you be mine, could you be mine? Please won't you be my neighbor?

I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you.

I have always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you.

SO let's make the most of this beautiful day. Since we're together we might as well say: Would you be mine? Could you be mine? Won't you be my neighbor? Please, won't you be my neighbor?

Hello Neighbor!

Whether you are a life-long Presbyterian, someone who worships with us during these winter months, or in our television neighborhood at home, we have heard and love the story of the Good Samaritan. The problem being that when stories are familiar to us, we can gloss over what they are really about.

Jesus offered the world something different than ever had been before or since. Jesus described "No one comes to the Father, except by me." If you are seeking a personal relationship with God as a companion, you have to come through Jesus. Judaism's means to Eternal life was through the Laws of Moses, what we often describe as the Pentateuch, the first Five Books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. SO, the setting here is that an expert in Jewish Law tries to test Jesus, by asking the underlying question of all believers: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds to the Jewish Lawyer: "What does the Law say?" Like the 5 Books of the Pentateuch, he replies with the most familiar 5 phrases of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, with all **your soul**, with all **your strength**, with all **your mind**, and love **your neighbor** as your self." Jesus affirms: "Right Answer". The problem in this story is you can have all the right answers and still not know the Lord. You may know about God, you may be able to recite the Laws, but "loving the Lord and your Neighbor" is something else again. So the Lawyer asks a further question: "Just who is my neighbor?"

Fred Rogers was a Presbyterian Minister, just like Pastor Diane and I. He had gone to 4 years of college, then to 3 years at a Theological Seminary. In addition to studying the Old and New Testaments, Theology, Church History, Hebrew and Greek, Preaching and Counseling, one of the requirements when at Seminary is that Presbyterian Ministers apply what they are learning out in the world. In the 1950s, in Pittsburgh, television was something brand new. Not flat screens, not TIVO recording, or YouTube, no Remote Controls or Color. Most of television was News or Game Shows all aimed for Adult audiences. Mr. Rogers wanted to have as his Field Work, a television show especially for children, that addressed the question "Who is my neighbor." Being a Presbyterian Minister, the answer Fred Rogers demonstrated in every show was "EVERYONE IS YOUR NEIGHBOR"!

In answer to the Lawyer's testing him, Jesus told a parable. There is a problem here not in what Jesus said, but in how we tend to identify with, to interpret Jesus' parable... **Whom do you identify with in the story?** Is it the Priest? How many Levites do we have in the congregation? Human Nature is we want to be the hero of the story. We know ourselves to be helpful, so we assume ourselves to be the Good Samaritan! EXCEPT, **In the first place**, when Jesus told this Parable, **no Samaritan** would have been thought of as being Good. In the Old Testament, after King Solomon, Assyria conquered the northern 10 Tribes of Israel, most were carried off or killed, some intermarried with the Assyrians in order to survive. Years later, those of the Southern Tribe of Judah were exiled and 70 years later returned from Babylon, wanting to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem, But the Samaritans said "NO, we worship on the Mountains!" So Samaritans were looked down upon both Racially and Religiously. **Second, Does Jesus ask "who acted as Good Samaritan?"** No, Jesus started this parable off describing "There was A Man who was going down from Jerusalem to

Jericho” and ended by asking “Which acted as Neighbor to the Man?” For Jesus, we are to identify with the one who was attacked, beaten, robbed and stripped. Have you ever felt abused like that? Left Helpless, stripped of dignity? When just because they could, someone attacked you, ignoring your humanity.

There is a folktale from Burma, similar to the Good Samaritan, which because it is a little different, may be heard with fresh ears. There was a man traveling across the country, who came passed a small village. As the sun was setting, he decided to sleep on this side of the road and enter the Village in the morning. Afraid of being robbed, he took the coin purse from round his neck and placed it under a rock for safe keeping. However, someone saw him do so, and while the man slept, this robber took all the money from the purse under the rock. When the traveler awoke, he found his money gone, and sat down at the Village gate and wept. People took interest in the weeping stranger and brought the man to the Mayor.

The man told his tale of woe, and the Mayor asked to be taken to this rock. Having the traveler identify which rock he had placed his money beneath, the Mayor ordered the Sheriff to “ARREST THIS STONE!” The Sheriff took the Stone into custody and brought it along with all the Village to the city center where the Mayor held a Court of Law. With all the Village Elders acting as Jury, the Mayor began his interrogation by asking the Stone “What is your name” but the stone was silent. The Mayor leaned closer and asked “Where did you come from?” Still the rock sat silent. The Mayor demanded “At least tell us how old you are?”

By this point several of the Elders like you, began looking to one another, smiling and chuckling. The Mayor shouted at the Stone: “So you don’t want to speak up? Tell us why you were loitering outside our village? Were you looking for trouble?” At which several of the towns people began to laugh out loud. The Mayor admonished his neighbors “Show some respect! This is our Home , our Village and Neighborhood, and this is a Court of Law.”

The Mayor turned back to the Stone. “You will not answer my questions, so I hold you in contempt. As punishment, you will receive 30 lashes with a stick.” The crowd could no longer contain their laughter. The Mayor turned to the crowd “Have you no respect, no shame at all. A crime was committed in our Village, and you laugh? I fine every one of you a coin a piece.” One by one, all of the villagers came forward and each dropped a coin into a bowl in front of the Mayor. The Mayor then gave the coins to the Traveler, apologizing that he had been the victim of a crime near their Village. The Traveler’s eyes filled with tears as what he had lost had been restored.

The Mayor wished the Traveler well in his journey and ordered the stone be returned to its place outside their village. People talked about this trial for quite some time. Some thought the Mayor acted foolishly, but most had to admit the Mayor had shown great wisdom. After that, every time a villager walked passed the rock, they were reminded that we all share the burdens of one another for anything that happens in our neighborhood.

“It’s such a good feeling to know you’re alive

It’s such a happy feeling you’re growing inside

And when you wake up ready to say: I think I’ll make a snappy new day!

It’s such a good feeling, a very good feeling, the feeling you know that we are friends.

You know you can always help to make each day a special way, by just being yourself. You grow in your own way. Everyone does. That’s one reason each one of us is different and special, and people can like us exactly as we are!”