

XIII Trinity 2022
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
St. Luke 10.23-37



“Won’t You Be My neighbor” was the opening theme to the educational children’s series *Mister Rogers Neighborhood* that aired on public television from 1968-2001.

Fred Rogers (1928-2003) was an ordained Presbyterian minister who exchanged the pulpit for the television studio. Each week he invited his audience, mostly 2-5 year olds, into his virtual neighborhood. He tried to teach children being a neighbor also meant being neighborly.

Fred Rogers was once quoted as saying...

...“All of us, at some time or other, need help. Whether we’re giving or receiving help, each one of us has something valuable to bring to this world. That’s one of the things that connects us as neighbors—in our own way, each one of us is a giver and a receiver.”

We can all learn something from what Mr. Rogers said.

This morning’s Gospel is the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*. It is perhaps the best-known “Jesus Story” even among non-believers. The term “good Samaritan” is used today to refer to anyone who goes out of his way to help another person in distress.

Twenty-one years ago today America came under attack. We must remember and pray for the thousands of “good Samaritans” who helped the injured and dying...many giving up their own lives in the process.

In the Gospel a religion teacher comes up to Jesus to ask what he has to do to get into heaven. He is really looking for a way to trap Jesus...but Jesus knows what the man is up to. So he asks the man to tell him what the Law says. The man answers the Law says to Love God above all else and love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus tells the man to do that and he will live.

But the religion teacher wanted to make himself look good and embarrass Jesus. He asks Jesus who is his neighbor. Jesus now begins his most famous “Once Upon a Time” stories.

In the story a man is traveling the Jericho Road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The road was notorious for being difficult and dangerous. Jesus doesn’t tell us anything about the traveller, only that he is attacked, beaten up, stripped naked and left for dead.

Along come the priest and Levite. Both had important work to do at the Temple. Levites were sort of the Temple acolytes...they helped the priests. When they see the man lying by the side of the road, they think he is dead. Touching a dead body would have made them unclean for service in the Temple. They both choose not to get involved. They did the wrong thing.

The next person to come along is the hero in the story...a Samaritan. Samaritans lived in what had been the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Jews and Samaritans were both descendants of Abraham and both claimed to worship the one true God. Although they shared a common ancestry, by Jesus’ time, Samaritans held religious beliefs and practices very different from Judaism. Jews and Samaritans had learned to despise each other.

The Gospel tells us the Samaritan’s “heart was moved with pity” at seeing the injured man. He gives him first aid and takes him to the nearest hotel. He gives the desk clerk some money with instructions to take care of him.

He is the hero because he did the right thing. Jesus then asks the religion teacher which man behaved like a real neighbor. The teacher answered, “The man who was kind.” Jesus told the man to go and do the same thing.

The lesson we learn from the Parable is a simple one: being a neighbor means more than just living next door to someone. Christian love means always doing what is best for our neighbors...and everyone is our neighbor. We want to treat other people the way we want to be treated. We want to always do the right thing for our neighbors.

What do we need to do to receive eternal life? Love God with our whole being; love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We must be more than neighbors...we must learn how to be Good Neighbors!

