

It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood,
A beautiful day for a neighbor,
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?
Won't you please,
Please won't you be my neighbor?

A man told a story about meeting Mr. Rogers. He tells about how he lost his grandfather and that he felt lost because of what his grandfather meant in his life. As he was leaving his dorm, he noticed that Mr. Rogers neighborhood was playing on the TV in the common room and he was drawn into watching it again. In the episode, Mr. Rogers mentioned that even when things seem to be going bad, one needs to look for the helpers in life. The young man left the dorm and was going to meet a friend when he got into an elevator, turned around and saw Mr. Rogers get into the elevator with him. He talks about getting the courage to thank Mr. Rogers for his show and what it meant to him when he was a child and Mr. Rogers asked him "Are you one of my neighbors?" The young man said that he was and they talked to for a short period of time before they arrived at the young man's floor and he began to get off of the elevator. As he did, he began to tear up, apologized for interrupting him as a celebrity and thanked Mr. Rogers for talking to him. Mr. Rogers noticed that he was beginning to tear up, stopped the door from closing, exited the elevator and asking the young man what was bothering him and if there was anything he could do to help. The young man broke down crying, explaining that his grandfather had died and that he felt lost. They spoke for some time and Mr. Rogers spoke of the loss of his grandfather. After spending some time together, the young man thanked Mr. Rogers and apologized for making him late for an appointment. In response, Mr. Rogers hugged him and told him that "Sometimes you're right where you need to be".

How often are we where we need to be? And when we're there, do we know how we need to be? Today's readings remind us that it is not hard to know the Lord's expectations for us. We're the ones who complicate things. The difficulty comes in doing what Our Lord expects of us; but why is that? In today's First Reading Moses, in his parting words to the Israelites, encourages them to see that what the Lord expects of them is not hard to know or achieve: it is turning to God with all their heart and soul and in following the commandments. In the second reading, we are reminded that through the Son, we are helped in turning to God with all our heart and soul. And then in the Gospel reading, things are clarified and simplified. We are told that everyone is our neighbor and that the love of that neighbor and the love for God are the path to fulfillment in life.

But let's look into this reading even closer and really think about it, because it is really something that society needs to heed today. A man is accosted as he was heading from the "good part of town (Jerusalem) to the "bad part of town" (Jericho). Some would say that he may have gotten what he deserved by heading into the bad part of

town. After a priest and a Levite pass him by, a Samaritan is overcome with compassion and helps the man. So the Samaritan put himself out and went out of his way to save someone he doesn't know and belongs to a social group that despises his social group (Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other). He did something few people do in our world today; he took a risk. Playing dead or injured on the side of the road was a popular ploy of thieves in that day. He then followed up taking a risk by giving of his own material wealth. Doing this was costly, he gave up his own oil and wine to treat his wounds and left money with the innkeeper to cover expenses. Then he followed up all of these things by giving of his time, because all of this was inconvenient. Taking a risk, giving of his material goods and his time was very inconvenient and was, what many would consider, a really bad investment.

But I want you think about something, this is what friends and family do for each other; this is what Christ is asking us to do for each other. We need to put ourselves out for our friends and family; we need to take risks and make sacrifices for them if they are in need because if we value Christ's friendship and want to be his friend, we will gladly "go and do the same" as we are told.

So let's do an experiment this week. Let's erase all the complicated self-help theories from our minds and actually try to follow this simple formula for living a life that is truly alive. Let's do two things this week. First, we can carry out our normal, everyday responsibilities with the right intention. We often we forget that most of our daily duties are actually Good-Samaritan-like deeds. A mother running a household is being a Good Samaritan for everyone under her care; every laborer or professional dedicates 8 or 10 hours every day to providing some kind of service for other people who need it. The kid who is faithful to his chores and his other activities is forming his character and getting ready to go out into the world to serve his neighbors; when we see our normal responsibilities from Christ's perspective, they take on their true, Good-Samaritan-like meaning and when we live them like that, we experience a deep sense of joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment in our lives that we didn't have otherwise.

The second way to implement Christ's simple formula is to decide right now, enlightened by the example of this parable and strengthened by the Holy Communion we are about to receive, that when we run across someone in need this week, we will lend them a hand. Whether friend or stranger, whether the need is material or spiritual, let's promise Jesus today that at least this week we will not just walk by on the other side of the street, but instead we will "Go and do likewise."

If we do, Jesus promises us, we will live.

Deacon Corey Compton, July 14, 2019, Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time