

Second Sunday of Lent, 2019  
St. Mary's Catholic Church  
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

*Would you be mine, could you be mine,  
Won't you be my neighbor?*

When I was growing up, my favorite TV shows were *Bugs Bunny*, *Lassie*, and *Mr. Rogers Neighborhood*.

As a youngster, I really liked Mr. Rogers. As I grew up, the genius of that show became even clearer. Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian minister, but a friend suggested that a TV audience could be a great congregation.

The puppets were great. The set was inviting. The music was some of the finest jazz piano on TV.

Mr. Rogers talked honestly with children about hard things, in a way that made sense to them.

For instance, back in 1981, Mr. Rogers looked right into the camera and talked to children about the violence that happens in the world.

"There are people in the world," Mr. Rogers said, "who are so sick and so angry that they sometimes hurt other people."

"When we hear about these things, it naturally makes us sad and angry."

"But," he said, "just because we are angry doesn't mean that we have to hurt other people too."

And then he said, "My mother always used to tell me that when something bad was happening, I should pay attention to the people who were trying to help. You'll always find someone who is trying to help."

Sadly, Mr. Roger's words from 1981 are needed more and more. This week's headlines prove that there are still sick people trying hurt others: Rockets fired from Gaza at Tel Aviv; five gang members charged with the murder of a 16 year old northern Virginia boy; the horrible headlines from New Zealand.

Lots of anger and violence. Mr. Rogers would tell us to focus on the people in this world who are

trying to help. I met someone like that while I was preaching in Las Vegas this past week. I met an elderly lady who volunteers at a pro-life pregnancy center 4 days a week. She said, “when I see today’s headlines, I only have two choices: I can either give up hope. Or I can keep *trying to do something beautiful.*”

As we listen to this section Luke’s Gospel, one thing is becoming very clear: *the storm clouds are gathering.* King Herod has already *killed* John the Baptist. Now he’s focused on Jesus

Jesus knows this, so Jesus says to his disciples, “The son of man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders... and be killed, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day be raised.”

Jesus will suffer. Then he says to us: “You must take up your cross... You must lose your life....”

“There will be blood,” Jesus promises. “*Come follow me...*”

Evil, angry people want to hurt Jesus. Jesus and his disciples had every excuse to either give up, or run, or hide.

But Jesus has another plan. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain to *pray*. And there, he becomes radiant with *love*, radiant with *glory* and *life!*

On top of the mountain, the conversation *could* have been about fear, or impending suffering... instead, the talk is about Jesus, God’s son, fulfilling the hope of the human heart.

On that mountaintop, the disciples catch a beautiful glimpse of what Jesus *will look like* when the passion is completed and the resurrection happens. He is transfigured by love.

Yes, the threats of the angry, bloodthirsty folks are real. But what does Jesus decide to do? He decides *to do something beautiful.* He decides to love. He literally *becomes beautiful*, because he is always faithful to his Father.

Years ago, I was driving somewhere and happened upon the aftermath of a terrible car accident. A drunk driver had hit another vehicle. The parents of a small child died. The drunk driver survived. The little girl survived too.

Some family members of the drunk driver had arrived and were accusing the police of using too much force in the arrest. Witnesses were yelling that the drunk driver should rot in prison. Angry words after bloodshed. Mangle metal and broken lives. And over on the curb, a firefighter with a smoke-covered face was playing with the little girl whose parents had just died. In the wreckage, he had found her favorite doll. The two of them were playing and talking.

*You always look at the ones who are helping. You always look at those who decide to do something beautiful.*

There are a billion Catholics in the world today. What could happen in our world if, following the example of Jesus, we always decided to do something beautiful?

We could always choose to participate in moments of transfiguration.

+ you see someone that you've been angry with. You want to tell them how angry you are, but instead you decide to say something beautiful. You say, "I forgive you." *Transfiguration.*

+ you have had a terribly busy week. The phone rings, and it is a friend who needs something. You're exhausted, but you decide to do something beautiful. So you say, "I'll be right over." *Transfiguration.*

+ You've had a horrible day, and now you're walking through the front door to encounter your less than perfect family. You're tempted to vent all your frustrations on the people who know you best. But you decide to do something beautiful, and you ask the first person you see, "How was your day?"

+ you see your least favorite politician on TV. Your anger and hatred well up. But you decide to do something beautiful. You say a prayer for them.

+ you want to pass judgement on someone. Then you remember that you are not perfect. Your patience had run out. Then you remember God's patience with you. You try to ignore the injustice going on around you. Then you decided to notice and do something. Do something beautiful. You are participating in transfiguration.

Every time that kind of grace breaks through our weakness, we are catching a glimpse of heaven, we are touching the reality of eternal life. And in eternity, we will discover that Mr. Rogers was right. That everyone is, in fact, our neighbor, in Christ.

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(When the homily was completed, Fr. Renninger invited people in the pews to participate in the Diocesan Annual Appeal)