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Won't You Be My Neighbor?

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Now that Immanuel is in the height of our Pumpkin Patch season, and we put on our “volunteer shoes” to serve the church and the community, I’m reminded of how Mister Rogers started every episode of his show Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood – by changing his shoes.

Mister Rogers would walk in the door of his house, and the first thing he would do after saying hello to us, his friends, would be to open the closet door and remove his bland, business suit jacket for a more colorful cardigan. Then, he’d exchange his dress shoes for more casual Sperry Top-Siders or Converse sneakers, all while singing his now-famous song, “Won’t You Be My Neighbor?”

But why? Like many of the things Fred did on his show, there were reasons rooted in child psychology, as well as Fred’s understanding of what it means

to be a Christian minister, and how he could fulfill his teaching role in ministry.

The most obvious reason for changing his business jacket and shoes each episode was that he created a pattern, a rhythm that invites folks into a feeling of security. Having a reasonable expectation of what's coming next provides comfort for children and adults alike. By performing the same actions at the beginning of the show every time, he was inviting the viewer into a safe space, a place where they could feel comfortable.

This rhythm can also be seen in our worship liturgy. When we gather as a community for church, we follow very predictable patterns that help us get into the right space to worship God and experience the Holy. These patterns help us to feel safe and comfortable, just as the cardigan and the sneakers reinforce that idea of comfort for his viewers.

More than just that though, by leaving his professional work clothes behind when he came into his home, Fred Rogers was modeling an important skill and act of ministry. In our increasingly busy world that we inhabit, it's easy for us to be so preoccupied with our professional lives that we never really leave work at the door. Work can always seem to be running in the background of our thoughts.

Many of us, myself included, can have trouble letting go and immersing ourselves in the present moment, and really engaging with the people we find ourselves with at that moment.

In the words of his song "Won't You Be My Neighbor," Fred is trying to remind us why all of this is so important. And as he is performing these actions, Fred is calling us to a ministry of presence.

"It's a beautiful day in this neighborhood
A beautiful day for a neighbor
Would you be mine? Could you be mine?"

It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood,
a neighborly day for a beauty,
Would you be mine? Could you be mine?"

I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you,
I've always wanted to live in the 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?

Won't you please, won't you please?
Please, won't you be my neighbor?
Welcome to this neighborhood, neighbor!"

Mister Rogers' invitation to "be my neighbor," is, of course, rooted in Jesus' instruction to all Christians, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." When the lawyer asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29). Mister Rogers is inviting us all to put ourselves into the shoes of the disciples who heard the Good Word that day.

As we continue to strive every day to put on our "volunteer shoes" and work together to serve God, our church, and wider community, as we unload and arrange pumpkins; make and sell delicious baked treats, soups, and arts and crafts; as we engage the many visitors our patch will bring to us, let's remember the words and actions Mister Rogers modeled for us over and over. His ministry for us is to be present, to be welcoming, and to ask, "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"

Enjoy this gentle reminder and [video](#) of Mister Rogers inviting all of us to be his neighbor.