

As some of you may know, my wife works a part time job at the library in Trempealeau Monday afternoon and evening which means I leave work early to watch my kids in the late afternoon. After the two-year-old went to bed, I bounced my infant to sleep as I watched *Won't You Be My Neighbor* on PBS, the Mr. Rogers documentary.

Admittedly, I watched it in passing as I was changing diapers and bouncing my son, so I didn't see every minute of it. It was a great documentary, but I would describe it as hagiographic. For those of you playing the home game, what hagiographic means is that the documentary tried to demonstrate how much of a saint Mr. Rogers was. And they succeeded. Who can think of a nicer man than Mr. Rogers? In fact, in one of the interviews, his son referred to him like a second Christ figure—even acting that way behind closed doors.

But one moment that made me stop in my tracks like a record scratching to a halt was the interview with his widow. Before Fred Rogers slipped into a coma on his deathbed, he was talking to his wife, Joanne, and he asked, “Am I a sheep?”

“Am I a sheep?” Being a presbyterian minister, of course he was referencing this parable, Matthew 25, the sheep and the goats. Joanne, his wife, said in reply, “If anyone is a sheep, you are.”

What do you think of that response? How does that response make you feel? “If anyone is a sheep, you are.” Is that a heartwarming response of a loving wife reassuring her husband? Is that something you would say to your spouse if he or she were on his or her deathbed and unsure of his or her status before God?

Now, we don't have the full unedited interview with Joanne Rogers. We don't know for certain that that was the only thing she said. It does seem that the secular documentary producers were intent on removing any theology from a man who oozed the love of Christ. But if you were at Mister Roger's deathbed, would you give that response? “If anyone is a sheep, you are.”?

**“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of [Mister Rogers], you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”** What hope is there for us? Jesus says to the sheep, **“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”** How does this not make us feel guilty? How does this not get heard as a list of things we *didn't* do? If *Mister Rogers* is on his deathbed unsure, what hope do I have? You know me, and I'm no Mister Rogers.

This is a challenging text, and by any plain reading of it, it's all law. What can I say in today's sermon about this? God wants your good works. Indeed, Mister Rogers did good things in his life, maybe more than you'll ever do in your lifetime. Those good things are indeed good, and Christians do good works

knowing they serve not just their fellow man, but Christ Himself. The question this text asks isn't what would Jesus do, but what would you do to Jesus?

What would you do to Jesus as the stranger at the door? What would you do to Jesus, your fellow Christian brother or sister who caught COVID? What would you do to Jesus, the one who is imprisoned? Would you feed the stranger? Would you care for Him sick with COVID? Would you visit Him in jail?

What would you do to Jesus? This isn't a hypothetical question. You know what you *actually* did to Jesus. In your sin, you condemned Him for a crime He didn't commit. In your sin, you sent Him to the Romans to be whipped, mocked, and spat upon. Your sins sent Him to the cross. Your sins killed Jesus. "Am I a Sheep?"

When we look at ourselves, we only see sin, failure, and uncertainty. When we look at ourselves, even the likes of Mister Roger doubts if he is good enough. "Am I a Sheep?" If you were at Mister Roger's deathbed, would you give that response? "If anyone is a sheep, you are."?

"Am I a Sheep?" The simple answer is, "Stop asking that question, look to Jesus!" He is the one who has forgiven you such that the Father no longer sees your sins, but only your good deeds. He is the one whose perfection exceeds even that of Mister Rogers. He is the one who has claimed you in baptism which turns goats into sheep.

Jesus is the one who calls out, "Won't you be my neighbor?" And Jesus loves His neighbor as Himself perfectly. He sends Christian friends to feed you and give you drink. He sends you Christians to welcome you in, to clothe you, to visit you when you're sick, and to visit you when you get imprisoned, even imprisoned for preaching the Gospel.

Throughout your life, those Christian friends have titles: mom and dad, friend and spouse, and parishioner and pastor. These are all the masks of Jesus serving you. I think all of you can name those parents, friends, family, and church support network.

Whenever we read Scripture, we always read it with all of Scripture in mind. Scripture interprets Scripture. That being said, we read Matthew 25, our Gospel text for today in view of the other parts of the Bible.

A key passage to understanding the Bible is Ephesians 2, specifically Ephesians 2:8. Let me read it for you, "**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,**" We still believe that! Your works don't turn you into you a sheep. Jesus the King justifies you, that is, He declares you to be a sheep, and so you are. He has made you into a sheep through the waters of Holy Baptism. He has made you a sheep by you dying to sin and rising again to new life. He has made you a sheep by forgiving you of your sins, even as He the lamb of God was led like a sheep to the slaughter.

But there's more in Ephesians 2, verses 9 & 10: **“not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** The King has made you into a sheep, and sheep do sheep things. They do sheep things without knowing it. Sheep bleat. Sheep eat grass. Sheep flock together.

Christians do Christian things, often without even knowing it. Christians pray for others. Christians do good deeds. Christians help their neighbors. Jesus Christ has good works that He has prepared for you to do beforehand, and you don't need to covet others' good works. Simply look around you and see the needs of others in your immediate vicinity.

It might not be influencing an entire generation of kids through a heart-warming and groundbreaking television show—that good work was part of Fred Rogers' repertoire. But even that night as I was watching the documentary, I was fulfilling Matthew 25 without even realizing it.

I fed the hungry as I heated up dinner for my daughter. I gave drink to the thirsty as I gave my son his bottle. I even clothed the naked as I dressed my daughter in her jammies after her bath and I changed my son's outfit when he spat up all over himself.

The point is not to make myself into a hero for doing the bare minimum a parent is called to do. Rather, God has prepared good works for you to do, and you don't even realize the half of them. The sheep themselves were surprised asking, “When did we do these things?” They scratch their heads! Think about your different stations in life. How many everyday good things have you done when you were “Just doing your job?” I'm sure many of you have changed your share of stinky diapers. I'm sure you've helped out classmates and coworkers. I'm sure you've obeyed your parents and gone the extra mile to make their life easier. Fill in the blank.

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood, not because of anything we've done, but because Christ has moved in and said, “Won't you be my neighbor?” In Christ alone we are sheep. On the day you die, don't rely on your good deeds, simply trust the one who has forgiven you and made you His. “Am I a sheep?” “Of course you are because the shepherd is calling your name! Don't you hear it?” Amen!