

There are so many ugly things happening in the world that it is high time to remember that there are beautiful things happening, too. When the Muslim ban was upheld by the Supreme Court this week, I was supremely depressed. I realized that I couldn't take much more, that I needed to go somewhere, do something, that would restore my faith in humanity. So Hank and I went to the movies. Wednesday night we went to see the documentary about Fred Rogers.

*Won't You Be My Neighbor?* is a desperately needed film right now. It focuses on a lot of things we haven't seen in our public life for a long time: humility, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and respect. And it reminds us that these qualities can exist, do exist, in real people. Fred Rogers, Presbyterian pastor, was not a freak of nature. He was simply a Christian who had the audacity to think that he could make the world a better place simply by loving children and making them feel loved. And when the world outside his

neighborhood got ugly and scary, he listened to their fears and helped them feel safe.

I guess I'm one of those children, because I want someone to listen to my fears and make me feel safe. So I went to the movie wishing I could go back to Mr. Roger's neighborhood, though I know that a show like that would never be made today. We tend to think of Mr. Rogers as a total weenie, a dweeb, and the butt of far too many late night jokes. It would be awfully easy to come to the conclusion that nobody lives in his neighborhood anymore.

But that's not the conclusion I came to. Leaving the movie, I realized that Mr. Roger's neighborhood is still around. You can find it in lots of cities and towns and even out in the country. You can find it at Willow Glen United Methodist Church. I heaved a great sigh of relief when I realized that church is one of the last places where it's still OK to be a nerd, where you don't have to be hip, where you can wear your old sweaters and the same sneakers every Sunday. Church is where you don't have to move fast or be on the cutting

edge of anything. Church is where being a little slow and behind the times doesn't get your show cancelled. And church is where we still think we can make the world a better place by loving children and making them feel loved.

Walking back to the car, I was thinking about how church is more important than ever. And for the privilege of being a part of this neighborhood, I want to give thanks. In this last sermon on the psalms, I want to use a couple of them to write a thank-you note to God. Over the past several weeks, we've used the psalms in many different ways: as a hymnbook, prayer book, spiritual diagnostic manual, wilderness survival guide, and daily diary. Today, the psalms are a gratitude notebook.

Everyone should keep one. I don't know about you, but I care so much about what is going wrong in the world that I need the psalms to bring to my mind what is going right. The danger of focusing on the ugly is missing out on the beauty. While it is well and good to use the psalms to complain, to get the bad things off

your chest, we also need to use the psalms to give thanks and to put some good things back into our minds and hearts.

So, in honor of Fred Rogers, this morning I just want to live into Psalm 100 and make a joyful noise to the Lord and enter into his gates with thanksgiving. And this week, Lord, didn't we see 150 beautiful VBS kids come into your courts with praise? To see them all here spending time in your neighborhood, growing and learning that the Lord is good: it warmed my heart. And all week long, didn't we see hundreds of amazing photos on Facebook of our youth who went to the Civil Rights Museum in Atlanta to learn about the racism that still bedevils us and Martin Luther King's beloved community that still eludes us and then went off to South Carolina to build that community, to repair that neighborhood? After a hard week, those pictures reassured me that your steadfast love endures forever, your faithfulness to all generations.

And I want to sing Psalm 30, one of my favorites, because I want to extol you, O Lord, for all the ways you draw us up and

refuse to let the forces of evil rejoice over us. O Lord, my God, I make it a point to tell everyone how I cried to you for help, and you healed me. This year, it's been 52 years since I nearly died from spinal meningitis. It's been 25 years since the brain surgery. Now it's been three years since the breast cancer diagnosis. No, I will never ever forget how you brought up my soul from Sheol three times and restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit. I am blessed beyond belief, and so I sing praises to you and give thanks to your holy name.

But there are others who are still down there, Lord. We can hear their weeping, and sometimes it lingers long into the night. But as surely as the sun rises, our prayers for them rise, too, and, by your grace, the joy and the privilege of loving them comes to us every morning. Whether it is by providing meals for the Zwingmans and the Farrows or sending texts and cards to the Quigleys or gathering to pray for the needs of the world weekly or by welcoming homeless women to Woodhaven or building new homes for families

in Mexico, this Church says, “Won’t you be our neighbor so we can love you?”

One thing I ask for, just one thing I seek after: to be able to live in your house, to be a part of your body, to join these good people in the work of loving your world all the days of my life so that I may behold your beauty as I see it in every soul who lives in this beloved neighborhood we call Church. Just like any other neighborhood, lots of sad things happen here, but when we come together to love each other, you turn our mourning into dancing and clothe us with joy. All summer long, our souls will praise you and they will not be silent. O Lord, our God, we give thanks to you forever. Amen.