

Posture is Everything

Message #4 in the series “Won’t You Be a Neighbor?”

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Good morning to you here in person and to you joining us from wherever you may be through YouTube. My name is David Grey and I am a certified candidate for ministry in the United Methodist Church and from time to time, I preach. It’s a pleasure to do so again this morning with all of you.

This morning, we are continuing in the message series, Won’t You Be A Neighbor? When Pastor Dave first provided the topic, I immediately thought of perhaps the most famous neighbor, or at least Pennsylvania’s most famous neighbor, Mister Rogers. Some of you may have grown up watching Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood on public television or have children or grandchildren who watched. Or, perhaps, you’ve seen his legacy live on in the children shows Daniel Tiger’s Neighborhood, Donkey Hodie, or the recent movie, A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood.

If it seems like I’m focused entirely too much on Mister Rogers, I have a good reason. This morning’s sermon title is Posture is Everything and I could not think of a better representation of good posture than Mister Rogers. Before we dive in, I need to establish what definition of posture we’re talking about.

When you think of the word, posture, if you’re like me, you immediately think of the position of the body. Stand up straight and all of that. However, there is another definition of posture. Another definition of posture, according to Merriam-Webster, is state or condition at a given time especially with respect to capability in particular circumstances.

To offer an illustration of this definition of posture, I found a video of Fred Rogers, testifying before a Senate Subcommittee in 1969. The background on the hearing was about a \$20 million grant for Public Broadcasting Service and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. However, at the time, due to the need for financing the ongoing Vietnam War, President Nixon wanted to reduce the grant to \$10 million.

The hearing was chaired by Senator John Pastore (Pas-toree), who was skeptical of television. Over the course of the hearings, his patience was running low and the likelihood that PBS would not receive the funding increased.

In stepped, Mr. Rogers. I’m going to show a short video of the hearing, which I hope illustrates the definition of posture:

[PLAY VIDEO]

Did you notice the posture of Mister Rogers? When he begins, he is unsure of himself but he retains his true nature and his message. He could have become flustered or angry. No, in the end, Mister Rogers acted like how one would expect Mister Rogers act.

This leads to the verse for today’s sermon. If you have your Bible or a Bible App, turn to Matthew 5:14-16.

If you're not as familiar with Matthew 5, just some background on it. Chapters 5 through 7 in the Gospel of Matthew, document Jesus's Sermon of the Mount. This event takes place after Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, underwent 40 days of temptation by Satan, began his ministry, and called his first disciples.

Through the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, and other principles of righteousness that govern the lives of those who decide to follow Him.

Reading from the English Standard Version translation, here is what Matthew records Jesus teaching:

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

First, did you notice how Jesus does not require qualifications. He just tells his Followers, which includes those in the room, "You are the light of the world." This is quite the compliment, but it is also a great responsibility that He has given to us. He never challenges us to become light. No, we are light, and we are either fulfilling or failing that given responsibility. I came across this passage by the theologian Charles Spurgeon from 1873, which states,

"Poor world, poor world, it is dark, and gropes in midnight, and it cannot get light except it receives it through us!...To be the light of the world surrounds life with the most stupendous responsibilities, and so invests it with the most solemn dignity. Here this, ye humble men and women, ye who have made no figure in society, ye are the light of the world. If ye burn dimly, dim is the world's light, and dense its darkness."

It's a hard time in our society to follow Jesus, isn't it? We're living in a world, which David Kinnaman of the Barna Group, calls "digital Babylon." He describes our digital Babylon as a culture marked by phenomenal access, profound alienation, and a crisis of authority. Yet, as Christ-Followers, we're called to be light and make disciples who make disciples. This can be anxiety inducing for some of us. We start asking questions like:

What if I don't have the answers to questions about my faith?

What if I can't make the time?

What if I'm just not the right person to do this?

What if I don't know how to open with others?

What is the point, anyway?

Think back to the video of Mister Rogers. He didn't start off confident. He was nervous and stammered in the beginning of his testimony. Do you think he was asking himself those questions or some version of them? What if I'm not the right person to do this? What if I don't have the answers to the questions?

Yet as he continued, he became more confident in his message because he was speaking with conviction about something he knew intimately. So, why do we struggle sharing something that we know intimately, the immense love of God?

Earlier this year, the Barna Group and the Navigators released a study, called “Growing Together.” Now for those of you who may not be familiar with either group, let me give some background. First, the Barna Group is a research firm dedicated to providing actionable insights on faith and culture, with a particular focus on the Christian Church. The Navigators have been operating for 90 years, helping people around the world bring hope and purpose to others through something they call “Life-to-Life” discipleship. This isn’t a program or curriculum but more of a commitment to help our friends know Jesus, starting from wherever they are in life.

According to the study of 1,643 U.S. Christian adults, the top five reasons why Christians are not interested in being disciplemakers.

5. This sounds like the job of a church leader or ministry professional
4. I wouldn’t know how to do it
3. I don’t think I’m knowledgeable enough about the Bible or Christianity
2. I don’t think I would be very good at it
1. I don’t feel qualified to address hard topics

Does any of this ring true for anyone here?

However, there were two interesting parts of the study. First, only 3% responded of having a bad past experience with discipling. The second point, they found that self-doubt declined as people embraced spiritual accountability and support for themselves. Let’s look back at the verse that Pastor Dave focused on last week: Luke 10:1 (ESV)

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go.

I always thought Jesus did this on purpose. He knew there would be a need for each of the apostles to have a partner, whether for support, someone to pass the time with as they walked from place to place, and to keep them accountable.

We also need someone, and probably not someone who we’re related to. I can imagine Jesus telling Andrew and Simon, James and John to split up and go with one of the other apostles. But again, we could all use someone to walk with us through life together and encourage us when we go out to tend the harvest and get beaten down by the job at-hand, to go back out and try again.

The thing that could help us as we go out into our neighborhoods is to understand who lives around us. Pastor Dave touched on this last week and I wanted to revisit it. I’m using the same report that he used, just two different sections of that report. The first section provides insights into the community beliefs and religious preferences. The second section focuses on practical applications of the 2021 survey.

Just a reminder that the data is taken from a 10-mile radius around St. Paul's. According to the data, the number one belief about God in the focus area is God is love and invites the world into a loving relationship.

The next data point I want to share is 57.9% agree that "People in the church do not behave as Jesus would behave." 62.5% agree belief in Jesus does not require participation in a church.

As far as participation, the study shows 67.4% are not involved in a religious congregation or community. Additionally, the trendline is showing that the level of involvement is declining in the study area. Also, it is not expected this trend will change, as 85.6% are likely to not make a change in their involvement.

The top five reasons for people considering not participating in a religious congregation or community:

1. Demands of raising children
2. Don't believe in God
3. Didn't feel welcome
4. Wasn't supported during crisis/time of need
5. Religion too focused on money

At this point, I would imagine some of you are ready for me to move on, and may be thinking "Is this a sociology lecture or a sermon?"

I didn't decide to talk about this information without a point. Unless we know how our community sees "us" (and when I say us, I'm speaking of every church within that 10 mile radius) then we cannot adjust our approach. So, what is our community looking for?

They want opportunities to develop personal relationships. They want family-oriented activities. They want opportunities to volunteer in the community. They want warm and friendly encounters.

And here's the thing about numbers and trends. They can change over time. Trends can be reversed. But, we have to start today to change. And if we don't start today, then when are we going to? Because as Pastor Dave taught a few weeks ago, "Culture shifts when people act differently than they used to." And, here's the thing. We won't know if we're making a difference. It may be years until the Holy Spirit is able to break through in someone's life. But, that's not our job. Our job is to be light to a dark world. Our job is to show the love of God to the world, whether we want the responsibility or not.

So, what can we do to improve our posture? Maybe as a church we adopt a neighborhood and offer to mow lawns, rake leaves, or other things that may be needed. Maybe instead of having church on Sunday, we do something similar to the College's Into the Streets, and we go out into the community and volunteer, collectively, as a church. Maybe we invite other churches to join in. Perhaps, it is as simple as having a scavenger hunt where members of the church go out into the community to complete such tasks as pumping gas for someone, helping to bag groceries, or leaving quarters at the laundromat.

In closing, as I was writing this message, I started thinking about Senator Pastore. At first glance, in my opinion, he seemed like a curmudgeon. Yet, when I thought about it more, I started to put myself in his shoes. How would I feel sitting and listening to people tell me what they think I want to hear hour after hour? By a certain point, I would crave authenticity. I would crave a personal connection. Someone who wouldn't worry about putting on airs or saying the right thing. This leads me to my final point.

We all have a story to tell about how God has shown us in our lives, His love, His grace, and His mercy. And, I believe if we improved our posture and showed more of our light, the harvest would be plentiful and the workers many.

Closing Prayer

Lord, who do you need me to see, who do you need me to hear, who do you need me to know, what do you need me to do, I am your servant, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Benediction

Hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off; fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.