

## McCabe United Methodist Church

Fall Kick-Off Series: "Won't You Be My Neighbor?"

### ***"What Difference Does It Make"***

Sermon on Mark 12:28-31; 1 Timothy 4 (9-17 & 9/18/16)

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

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Let's Pray: Holy, powerful, merciful God, open our eyes, open our hearts, and open our minds so we may see. Show us what it means to walk to with someone and to be open to those walking with us. May the words of my mouth and may the meditations on each of our hearts this morning be acceptable in your sight. You alone are our Rock and You alone are our Redeemer. Amen.

When our son Berk was a little guy, he was maybe 3 or 4 years old, he came walking out of his room one day wearing a button up sweater. Berk said to my wife Brenda, I'm just like Mr. Rogers!

Many of you know, like Pastor Jenny shared last week, that Mr. Rogers from Mr. Rogers Neighborhood was actually a pastor.<sup>1</sup> He lived this out using his TV Show. Fred Rogers was a pastor and teacher at heart. Fred Rogers wanted to make a difference for the Kingdom of God...

Teachers and school people are near and dear to my heart. My grandma worked in a school. My mom and aunt worked in schools. My wife Brenda is a teacher. I worked in the schools for years before I became a pastor.

I know God uses teachers to make a difference.

When I worked in the schools, I wanted this saying from Haim Ginott to be foundational in what I did. See what you think.

There's an insert in your bulletin. At the top it's titled TEACHER...

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred\\_Rogers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fred_Rogers)

Haim Ginott writes: <sup>2</sup>

*I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations it is my response that decides whether a response will be escalated or deescalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.*

*Haim Ginott*

I read this and I hear God saying: Teachers, you make a difference. I hear God saying: Love your neighbor as yourself.

In the schools, in Sunday School, at SAY Yes, in small groups, large groups, as coaches, and so forth, teachers make a difference.

We can help make lives miserable or joyous. We can be tools of torture or instruments of inspiration. We can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal.

It doesn't matter if you have a position of power and prestige or if you feel like the world has knocked you down and spit on you, today, whether we like it or not, today, each and every one of us is called to be a teacher in the faith.

Hear parts of our second reading from Eugene Peterson's Message Bible. From 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy, Chapter 4, the Apostle Paul is writing to young Timothy. He's writing about what it means to be a teacher in the faith. He writes: <sup>3</sup>

*The Spirit makes it clear that as time goes on some are gonna give up on the faith. They'll chase after demonic illusions. They'll be influenced*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://eqi.org/ginott.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.biblestudytools.com/msg/1-timothy/4.html>

*by professional liars. Our Scripture continues: You've been raised up on the Message of the faith. You've followed sound teaching. Now teachers, and every one of us is a teacher, now pass this on. Throw yourself into the venture. It won't be easy but we trust in the One who can truly save us.*

This Scripture asks: Are you hedging your bets or Are you all in?  
Are we all in OR are we just KINDA in?

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4 has more:

*Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion. Exercise daily in God. Get in shape. There's NO room for spiritual flabbiness.*

PLEASE! Workout. Be disciplined in a life of God.

Spiritual flabbiness... Man... That's quite an image...

Let's switch gears for a moment. Teachers, and again that means all of us. Teachers, consider this question: Think about one person who's impacted your faith. Think about one person who's made a difference in your life as a follower of Jesus.

Do you have someone in mind? Because when you have someone in mind, think about the difference they make. How do they touch your faith? <sup>4</sup>

So for example...

I could name many. I'll pick one.

Some of you might remember Jim Petrik. How he made a difference - he always believed in me.

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<sup>4</sup> The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry, by Kenda Creasy Dean & Ron Foster. Kenda Creasy Dean is Associate Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. Ron Foster is a United Methodist pastor in Maryland.

Or Brenda, my wife; since I've known her, Brenda is my leading voice for encouragement and accountability (how she makes a difference in my faith).

Do you have a person and a brief sentence? Because step number two is to replace that person's name with Jesus' name.

So for me, instead of "Jim Petrik always believed in me," it would be "Jesus always believes in me."

Instead of "Brenda is my leading voice for encouragement and accountability", it would be "Jesus is my leading voice for encouragement and accountability".

Friends, our faith is a faith of relationships. We live our faith in the flesh and God often comes to us through ordinary people around us. God often comes to us through regular people, through people like you and me and our neighbors.

Don't get spiritually flabby... because God wants to use you.  
Don't get spiritually flabby... because God is using the people around you and we have to be in shape to realize it.

Jim Petrik believed in me...  
Jesus believes in me...

Brenda encourages me and holds me accountable...  
Jesus encourages me and holds me accountable...

God often speaks to us through other people.

Our Scripture reminds us that there will be those who depart from the faith. We have temptations and idols all around us. It's not easy to be a teacher. It's not easy to be a teacher of the faith.

We need each other. The world needs us. Again, our Scripture tells us to ...be trained in the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, with silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness.

The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to a guy maybe 14 or 15 years old, roughly around the age of our confirmation students. He's saying:

*Command and teach these things. Don't Let anyone look down on you because you are young.<sup>5</sup> Be the example. Be the teacher. Lead people to Jesus in your speech, in your behavior, in love, in faith, in purity. In these things people see your heart.<sup>6</sup>*

Our Scripture says we must practice these things. We must immerse ourselves in them and wrestle with them so that everyone can see our progress.

It begs the question. Who are you walking with? Who are you walking with to help them grow in their faith?

AND

Who is God using to help you grow in your faith?

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy Chapter 4 ends saying that if you persist in living and growing in your faith, if you teach and are willing to be taught, you will save yourself and you will save the people who hear you.

Friends...

Sunday school teachers save lives...

School teachers and school personnel save lives...

You and I, as students and teachers of the Word, every one of us has the potential to join with God in saving lives...

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Timothy 4:11-12b Common English Bible (CEB)

<sup>6</sup> Paraphrase of selected verses in 1Timothy 4:13-16 (CEB)

We need each other. We need each other for teaching and for encouragement and for gentle nudging.

Let's go back to the Frightening Conclusion statement from Haim Ginott<sup>7</sup>... If you turn your bulletin insert over, you'll see a similar saying titled: MEMBER OF THE BODY OF CHRIST.

I've played with it, and as someone who loves schools, who loves teachers, who loves the church, and who loves Jesus, I'm curious to hear your thoughts on my attempt at adapting this.

See what you think. Does it hold true for the church? Does it hold true for a follower of Christ?

*I have come to the frightening conclusion. I am a decisive element in the church community, for the Kingdom of God. It is my personal approach, and my relationship with Jesus Christ, that creates the climate. It is my daily practice of faith that makes the weather. As a follower of Jesus, as part of the Body of Christ, I possess tremendous power. I possess tremendous power to make others in the community of faith, and the broader community, miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or honor, hurt or heal, build up or tear down. In all situations, it is **my** response, as someone seeking to live into having the mind of Christ, that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated. In all situations, it is **my** response that decides whether the ministries of the church are supported or undermined, and whether the power of the Holy Spirit is unleashed or squelched.*

*(Significantly adapted from Haim Ginott)*

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<sup>7</sup> <http://eqi.org/ginott.htm>

Friends, as teachers of the faith God calls us to make a difference. God calls us to make a difference within these walls, across our neighborhood and community, and God calls us to make a difference throughout the world.

Let's Pray:

Here we are Lord. We hear your calling in the day and in the night. We pray for your Holy Spirit to rain down and flood this place so as we offer ourselves to you and as we go into the world, we may go with humility and boldness. So we may go as teachers and students of the faith. I pray in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.