

Fred Rogers: Spirit Responds to Need, Not Judgment

Many people will remember Fred Rogers as the cardigan-and-tennis-shoe-wearing host of PBS's immensely popular show, "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood."

Until now, few may have known Rogers was an ordained minister in the Presbyterian church. His ability to communicate sincere affirmation and acceptance to young children was a gift many of us would like to share. That gift resonated with adults, as well.

The "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood" Web site contains links to [four video clips](#) from Rogers' life. Watch the clips from 1992, when he received an honorary degree from Boston University, and from 1998, when he received the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Emmys.

The authenticity of his life broke through with depth and joy in those settings where skepticism and cynicism often lurk.

The following words from Rogers, by way of an interview he gave *Christian Century* magazine about 10 years ago, give insight into his character, and maybe our own.

"I remember so keenly one of the times I learned how individually the Spirit can work," Rogers said. "It was years ago, and Joanne [the concert pianist who married Rogers in 1952] and I were worshipping in a little church with friends of ours, another husband and wife. We were on vacation, and I was in the middle of my homiletics course at the time."

"During the sermon I kept ticking off every mistake I thought the preacher-he must have been 80 years old-was making," he continued. "When this interminable sermon finally ended, I turned to my friend, intending to say something critical

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about the sermon. I stopped myself when I saw the tears running down her face.”

“She whispered to me, ‘He said exactly what I needed to hear.’ That was a seminal experience for me,” Rogers remembered. “I was judging and she was needing, and the Holy Spirit responded to need, not to judgment.”

Thank the Spirit for the legacy of Fred Rogers. Be grateful, too, for such strong testimony to the humility and honest human posture required that the Spirit might be more alive in our neighborhood.

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