

“Follow Your Star”

What path is God shining light upon for you? The Wise Ones found what they were looking for by following the lighted path. **When we trust the ‘star’ that God hung out for us, we move toward life in its fullest and discover joy beyond imagining.**

Or, as this New Worship Series’ title asks, **“Who Are You?”** That question has multiple applications. The Magi did not need to ask the Christ Child, ‘Who Are You?’ because they followed the Star to find “the King of the Jews”. But did they fully understand how much more he was than the infant king of the Jews? Do we truly know the complete answer to the question of “Who Is Jesus?” As the Magi had the Star to guide them in their quest for the ultimate purpose and meaning of their lives, **“Who Jesus Is” for each of us is also the Divinely Provided “Star” for us to follow in our most important and valuable journey of the True Way of Life. How do we follow our “Star”? Who or what is “Your Star”?**

During the Christmas Season many of my family and I attended a local presentation of the musical, **“The Wizard of Oz”**. After Dorothy found herself in a bizarre place, she tried to find guidance about where she was. Glenda told her to go to see the Wizard of Oz to get back home. She asked for directions from several people and the answer was **“Follow the yellow brick road!”** What is our “yellow brick road” – our **“Star”**?

Perhaps, ironically, the reason the Magi followed the “Star” leads us to our “Star” – our “yellow brick road”. I could bring this message to a conclusion by simply reminding everyone the Magi found the toddler Jesus in a house in Bethlehem when they returned to following the “Star”. However, what it means to **“Follow Your Star”** is also important, so this sermon is not coming to an immediate conclusion.

Margaret and I went to go see a movie recently, which I highly recommend. It is titled, **“A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood”**. Although Rev. Fred Rogers, the creator of **“Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood”** ministered to children, this movie is probably too intense for young children. Rogers was an Ordained Presbyterian Minister, who put his faith to work in his everyday life. His death was a significant loss. Although I have not found a specific quote of Rogers identifying the **“Star”** he followed, it is clear to me his “Star” – his **“yellow brick road”** – his **Path was Jesus Christ**. Just as Jesus shocked many of the leaders of his day during his public ministry, Rev. **Rogers’ way of relating to people of all ages** was remarkable and amazing.

The movie reveals some important aspects of Roger’s approach, especially when it referred to his interaction with a writer from **Esquire Magazine**. The movie changed some of the names and some of the situations, so I uncovered the actual Esquire article, **“Can You Say ... Hero?” by Tom Junod originally published in the November 1998 issue and republished on April 6, 2017**. Listen to some examples of how Rev. Fred Rogers sought to follow his “Star”, Jesus Christ, through these excerpts, “Once upon a time, there was a boy who didn’t like himself very much. It was not his fault. He was born with cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is something that happens to the brain. It means that you can think but sometimes can’t walk, or even talk. This boy had a very bad case of cerebral palsy, and when he was still a little boy, some of the people entrusted to take care of him took advantage of him instead and did things to him that made him think that he was a very bad little boy, because only a bad little boy would have to live with the things he had to live with. In fact, when the little boy grew up to be a teenager, he would get so mad at himself that he would hit himself, hard, with his own fists and tell his mother, on the computer he used for a mouth, that he didn’t want to live anymore, for he was sure that God didn’t like what was inside him any more than he did. He had always loved Mister Rogers, though, and now, even when he was fourteen years old, he watched the Neighborhood whenever it was on, and the boy’s mother sometimes thought that Mister Rogers was keeping her son alive. She and the boy lived together in a city in California, and although she wanted very much for her son to meet Mister Rogers, she knew that he was far too disabled to travel all the way to Pittsburgh, so she figured he would never meet his hero, until one day she learned through a special foundation designed to help children like her son that Mister Rogers was coming to California and that after he visited the gorilla named Koko, he was coming to meet her son.

At first, the boy was made very nervous by the thought that Mister Rogers was visiting him. He was so nervous, in fact, that when Mister Rogers did visit, he got mad at himself and began hating himself and hitting himself, and his mother had to take him to another room and talk to him.” **“Mister Rogers didn’t leave, though. He wanted something from the boy, and Mister Rogers never leaves when he wants something from somebody.”** “He just waited patiently, and when the boy came back, Mister Rogers talked to him, and then he made his request. He said, **‘I would like you to do something for me. Would you do something for me?’** On his computer, the boy answered yes, of course, he would do anything for Mister Rogers, so then Mister Rogers said, **‘I would like you to pray for me. Will you pray for me?’** And now the boy didn’t know how to respond. He was thunderstruck. Thunderstruck means that you can’t talk, because something has happened that’s as sudden and as miraculous and maybe as scary as a bolt of lightning, and all you can do is listen to the rumble. The boy was thunderstruck because nobody had ever asked him for something like that, ever. The boy had always been prayed for. The boy had always been the object of prayer, and now he was being asked to pray for Mister Rogers, and although at first he didn’t know if he could do it, he said he would, he said he’d try, and ever since then he keeps Mister Rogers in his prayers and doesn’t talk about wanting to die anymore, because **“he figures Mister Rogers is close to God, and if Mister Rogers likes him, that must mean God likes him, too.”**

The author continued, “As for Mister Rogers himself ... well, he doesn’t look at the story in the same way that the boy did or that I did. In fact, when Mister Rogers first told me the story, I complimented him on being so smart — for knowing that asking the boy for his prayers would make the boy feel better about himself — and Mister Rogers responded by looking at me at first with puzzlement and then with surprise. ‘Oh, heavens no, Tom! I didn’t ask him for his prayers for him; I asked for me.’ **‘I asked him because I think that anyone who has gone through challenges like that must be very close to God. I asked him because I wanted his intercession.’**”

Later in the article, the author wrote, “Once upon a time, a man named Fred Rogers decided that he wanted to live in heaven. Heaven is the place where good people go when they die, but this man, Fred Rogers, didn’t want to go to heaven;” **“he wanted to live in heaven, here, now, in this world,”** “and so one day, when he was talking about all the people he had loved in this life, he looked at me and said, **‘The connections we make in the course of a life — maybe that’s what heaven is, Tom.’** ‘We make so many connections here on earth. Look at us — I’ve just met you, but’ **‘I’m investing in who you are and who you will be, and I can’t help it.’**”

Through God’s Son, Jesus Christ, we have been shown the Ultimate Example of “investing in who you are and who you will be”. **God’s Agape – Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love for you, me, and All People in the “Word” made flesh – in Your Star, Jesus Christ, is a major part of how our Divine Parent has invested in Who You Are!** If we examined all of the encounters Fred Rogers had of “investing” in who people are and will be, we would, of course, observe him sharing Agape Love but more than that, he **took the time to wait and look for the opportunity to really understand someone else’s need, to find a way to communicate that understanding, which demonstrated God’s and Jesus’ high value of the other person, and to actually care for the other person’s welfare. Further, Rogers invited others in need to do him the favor of helping him, specifically, by praying for him.** That may all seem a bit too much to ask us to do but remember, Jesus taught his followers in **Matthew 5:44, “agape love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”,** and when he was crucified, Jesus prayed in **Luke 23:34, “Forgive them, Father! They don’t know what they are doing.”**

Jesus Christ is our “Star”! If you **“Follow Your Star” – Jesus Christ,** then like Rev. Fred Rogers, you will invest God’s Agape Love in all people you are able to relate with and God’s Investment in You will be multiplied exponentially! **You won’t merely live in God’s Kingdom when you die but you will dwell in it in the present as you “Follow Your Star” – Jesus Christ!** Amen.