

# Neighborhood

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All this leads me to wonder when the next religion will pop up. Will a new religion arise to “throw shade” and supersede all the rest? Maybe it’s already arrived and thrives right before our eyes.

Could there be an alternative faith beyond all other faiths, something that doesn’t even need to call itself a faith?

Have you listened to the podcast, “Finding Fred”? Yes, Fred Rogers of “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood.” For those of us who remember watching the PBS program or those who have seen the current films on the man, there is a certain emotion that stirs just seeing his picture or hearing his voice. The podcast, hosted by Carvell Wallace, an African-American author and contributor to the New York Times Magazine, highlights some fascinating facets to the uncommon man and his unforgettable message.

I was impressed that Rogers was a minister who didn’t feel the need to talk about his faith or God with children or parents. His “neighborhood” somehow seemed more real, more honest and frankly more loving than many other neighborhoods of traditional beliefs.

“I like you just the way you are” he would say. Quite a worldview or “religion.” A spirituality that sings beyond spiritualities. His ministry – and he did see his program as a ministry – was to encourage families and children to love others and love themselves. As the podcast stated, he was “very affirming

of all people ... he found the good in all faith traditions” and he was “very sensitive toward people who came from no faith tradition at all.”

This got me thinking more expansively, while at the same time, more specifically, individually. I wondered: if all other religions passed away and the Religion of Fred remained, what kind of world would be possible?

Maybe that sounds too simplistic – too idealistic or dreamy. Probably, but aren’t all spiritual traditions propagated and propelled forward to a great extent by ideals and dreams?

“I like you just the way you are.” Some may say Fred was shaped by his Presbyterian roots. Others may say he shaped his own unique religion based on a belief in people with more concern for Goodness than God.

Carvell Williams summarizes “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood” as “a beacon, a map, a guide for how to treat one another with kindness ... to see ourselves in one another and to accept the ways in which we’re different.”

This wide-open neighborhood may not be a garden to grow a new religion. On the other hand, we may find that seeing ourselves through the eyes of children is the only kind of religion that holds roots, shoots and fruits for the future of the neighborhood – nurtured by all neighbors in the human family.

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