

What Ought We Be? – 2 Peter 3:8-15a

Rev. Matt Nieman

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Among the famous people who died in 2023 was Jerry Springer. He was 79 when he died back in May. I won't ask you to raise your hands if you watched the Jerry Springer Show, which was a staple of daytime TV from 1991-2018. Because, in retrospect, if you did watch the show you may not be proud of it now.

Springer was a local politician in Cincinnati back in the 80s. He even served as mayor there for a time. He got into TV, and when the Jerry Springer Show premiered, it was a rather serious political and current events talk show. Rev. Jesse Jackson was a guest on the show, as was Col. Oliver North. The problem was that the ratings for the show in those early years weren't good.

So, Springer brought in a new producer, and the new producer changed the format to the one that brought it enduring ratings success. It was about family squabbles that pitted family members against each other—figuring out and revealing who was sleeping with you and whose baby was whose. There wasn't a lot of talking that went on in this talk show. It was more a show where people yelled at each other and even engaged in violent behavior.

But, it drew ratings. It found its niche in a format that put the spotlight on disfunction and people doing bad things to other people.

Five months before his death, Springer was interviewed on David Yontef's *Behind the Velvet Rope* podcast and asked if he considered himself the "granddad of reality TV." Springer responded, "No, I just apologize. I'm so sorry. What have I done? I've ruined the culture."

Springer was also Jewish, and is on record as saying, "Life is 99 percent luck. One percent is left to your own effort. But I also believe in God, because someone created this wonderful thing [life] that I experience every day. And under any moral code you say thank you."

There's no doubt that Judaism calls people to make good choices about the kind of people they will be, and we know Christianity does as

well. Peter Marty, a Lutheran pastor and the editor of *The Christian Century*, recently wrote in that magazine about the life he seeks to live. He names three things:

1. He wants to lead a happy life, and he says he doesn't mean "feel-good experiences that bring gratification at others' expense, but rather a happy state of mind. ..."
2. He also wants to be an interesting person, leading a psychologically rich life.
3. His third desire echoes themes from the heart of the Christian faith: "I also want to live a life of deep meaning in which there's a moral center: one where virtue is prized, depth of character matters, and purpose comes through serving others. In its best moments, this life of meaning gets organized less around self-centered desires and more around generous commitments that help other lives flourish."

There's also an explicitly Christian theme in how the author of 2nd Peter in the New Testament asks the question in chapter 3, verse 11: "... what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for ... the coming of the day of God? ..."

What sort of persons should we be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?

As we wait with hope, we work—not to divide, not to put down, not to be catalysts for conflict. We work, instead, to bring peace to the world and greater prosperity for all. We work to love God and love our neighbors.

You and I will probably never have the platforms that Jerry Springer had or that so many celebrities have today. But, we still can have an impact. On our own or through communities of like-minded neighbors, leading lives of holiness and godliness will more fully bring in the kingdom of God.

After witnessing the blessing of our children doing their program today, let's be models to them so that they too will be models of holiness and godliness and will, therefore, embrace this purpose in their own lives.

What sort of persons will we be?

