

Sermon Title: Happiness
Text: Matthew 5:3-12
By: Rev. Terry Carty
Date: 02-06-2011
Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church
Season: Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

Main Point: The beatific way of life makes sense and offers deep happiness only if you can discern the kingdom of heaven as a present reality and draw strength and encouragement from it while trusting God for its ultimate fulfillment.

Last night I was sorting through some receipts from Christmas that we still on the countertop. Among the various gift receipts I found an online Gift Card to LL Bean that must have come with the shirt that my brother-in-law gave me.

Seeing that it expires February 15, I rushed to the computer and logged into my LL Bean account. There I found a shirt that is just the right color AND fits my extra long arms! I quickly added it to my shopping bag and went to the checkout where I redeemed my coupon, charged the rest to my credit card and was informed that true happiness will occur in 3 to 6 business days when the shirt will arrive at my door.

Actually, all it took for me to feel a happy feeling was ordering the shirt. A moment of bliss - pleasure that I justified by using the online coupon.

Happiness seems to be a commodity these days. In 2009 alone more than 650 books were published with the word 'happiness' in the title or subtitle. The most popular class ever taught at Harvard was one on happiness with an enrollment peaking at 850 students.

A couple of weeks ago on my Southwest Airlines flight I was pondering the sermon I was preparing on the Beatitudes. I slipped the airline magazine out of the seatback and was again looking at a route to happiness. The cover read "Happiness, it's less elusive than you think. But you might be surprised where we found it."

I turned to the table of contents and noted several articles under the heading of "Get Happy!" *The Beamer* article told me that scientist say that even faking a smile leads to happier feelings. *The Exam* was an 8 question quiz that evaluated how happy I am.

The main article took me most of the flight to read but it was very informative. The author of *Being Happy*, Tal Ben-Shahar, who also taught the popular class at Harvard was quoted "Many people have the misunderstanding about what makes for a happy life – that it's a constant flow of positive emotions. That's unrealistic." Dr Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of *The How of Happiness*, says "I wouldn't put sad and happy on

the same scale... When I study happiness, I do it as a kind of position... It's more an overall characteristic or disposition."

That is where I connected with the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:3-12, the opening images of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Beatific Life, for Matthew, was Jesus' answer to how to have the overall characteristic or disposition of happiness.

Last week I focused on the Beatific Life as the 'blessed' life. I went behind simple translations of the scripture to the explain the greater depth of the original language: the *poor in spirit* are those who find themselves *humbled* in comparison to God's Spirit. And *those who mourn* are those who are *repentant* because they feel sorry or guilty for their pridefulness.

But I saved the happiness factor for today. The word usually translated as "*Blessed*" is also sometimes translated as "*Happy*." Yes, the Beatitudes implications for God's blessing is one of happiness and sometimes blissful joy.

This is my paraphrase:

3 Happiness comes to those who are humbled in comparison to God, for they find themselves in the kingdom of heaven.

4 Happiness comes to those who are sorry for having been too proud, for they will experience forgiveness.

5 Happiness comes to those who control themselves, for they will be given the work of stewardship of the earth.

6 Happiness comes to those who truly yearn for God's way to prevail, for their yearning will be fulfilled.

7 Happiness comes to those who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

8 Happiness comes to those who truly seek to be pure like God, because God will make them pure.

9 Happiness comes to those who work for peace in all things, because they will realize that they are brothers and sisters of the same Father – God.

10-11 Happiness comes when others make fun of you, or even persecute you, because you are living a Godly life, for you will find yourselves living in the kingdom of heaven.

The payoff comes in the 12th verse:

12 Be happy and glad, for your reward is great in heaven, just like it has been for those who have lived this kind of life before you.

Now you may be thinking: "You mean I don't get the payoff until I go to heaven?" What I mean is that the Beatitudes are just a nice greeting card unless you begin to think of the kingdom of heaven as a present reality. It is not where you go after you quit living. It is where you go to truly live: a state of happiness, a condition of joy, that comes to us

when we trust that God will fulfill us when we seek to live the life God intended for us: humble, meek, controlled, caring, forgiving, peace filled.

The professor at Harvard teaches that it is not the focus on happiness that is important. It is more important to think about what is important for me to do in my life. Over the years, he says, I would think less and less about my happiness because I am thinking a lot more about things that are meaningful to me.

The 'How to be Happy' author says "you can become happier just like you can become fit... it's work, but the efforts work. It's not fun – to try to be grateful, to try to be optimistic, invest in relationships, or do whatever it is that makes you happy. But some of it is going to turn into a habit. A life-enhancing one."

Jesus teaches that happiness in living comes when we seek God's kingdom even in our everyday lives – and we trust that God is constantly helping us live the Beatific Life.