

Sermon for November 2nd, 2014

Twenty First Sunday of Pentecost, Matthew 5:1-12

Blessings and peace to you from God the Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Some of you may know that the Sunday before last when I was **not** here I was helping my sister move from Utah to Pennsylvania. We made the 2,100 mile journey so she could **relocate** to live with her daughter, son in law, and new grandson. All was going along pretty well until **reality** set in when I had to leave to fly back out here. It was only 3 days later that my sister texted me and told me she was not 'happy' there. She gave me a **laundry** list of reasons why: the people were **not** friendly, she did **not** like all the traffic, she did **not** know her way around, and the **list** went on. My response was for her to give it some time. **Today**, as I am standing right here in **this** pulpit giving **this** sermon, my sister is having her furniture loaded into a pod to return to Utah. As a result of her unhappiness, she will be **leaving** tomorrow morning to make the **2,100** mile drive back to Utah by herself this time.

The **bottom** line for all of this is that she **thought** if she moved somewhere else, somewhere that she **felt** she would be *'happy'* her life would be better, things would be **different**, and things would be **alright**. But, I am **sorry** to say; in reality she did **not** find her *'happiness'* in some other location.

Happiness, what **is it** about that word or concept that is **so** elusive for many of us in our lives? How do we **measure** *happiness*? How do we **know** when we are truly *happy*? And what **makes** us *happy*? The song I just talked about in the children's sermon says that if we are happy and we know it then our face will surely show it. Hmmmm –really, how many times have you been *unhappy* and you have put on a happy face just because?? True happiness. **Where** does it come from? Out here in the world? (Gesture out in the room) Or in here? (Point to my heart).

If we look closely at **all 3** of our readings for this morning **each** one of them are messages of hope but **not** necessarily '*happiness*'. In John's book of Revelation we heard of **great** multitudes standing before the throne, **robed** in white, angels **falling** on their faces, **worshipping** God, **singing, praising** Him. For these are the multitude who have come out of the **great ordeal** John writes, the ones who came come through the **earthly** suffering, the ones whose robes have been washed in the blood of the lamb, the ones who will **hunger** no more, the ones who will **thirst** no more, the sun will not **strike** them, the heat will not **scorch** them, the Lamb will be their **shepherd** and God in His grace and mercy will **wipe** away every tear from their eyes. Oh, '*happy*' day once they are a part of the Kingdom of God!!!

In the second reading from 1st John we heard about the **love** God has given us—all of us. We are **beloved**, yet the **fullness** of what we will become has not yet been revealed to us—but when it **is revealed**, when **our** time comes, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is. Those of us who have **hope** in Him—we will be purified just as **He** is pure. Oh, *'happy'* day once we are a part of the Kingdom of God!!!

Our third reading comes from what is known as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. These teachings encompass 3 chapters in Matthew's gospel. The crowds had **followed** Jesus, he went **up** on the mountain, he **sat** down, and then his disciples **came** to him. Jesus **taught** them what and how they were to be as His disciples. What I want you to notice is that Jesus offers blessings at the very beginning of the teaching. He **does not wait** until he is finished to let them know that they are blessed. Also, I would say in our world view today, if we look **closely** at what Jesus pronounced to them as blessings—being **poor in spirit**, being in **mourning**, being **meeek**, being **hungry and thirsty** for righteousness, being **merciful**, being **pure in heart**, being the **peacemaker**, being those who are **persecuted**, and being those who are **insulted**—these things do not seem to be great virtues or much of a blessing to us at all.

Ahhhh, this is where the Kingdom of God comes in, this is where Jesus turns everything upside down and on its head. For you see there is a **vast**

difference between being *'happy'* and being *'blessed'*. Being *'happy'* is an emotional state and being *'blessed'* includes spiritual well being, **basking** in God's **grace**—in God's **glory**—in God's **love**. The people who were following Jesus that day were people who probably were not thinking of themselves as ones who were too blessed. They were the **poor**, the **marginalized**, the **ignored**, the **sick**, the **crippled**, and the **needy**. They were the ones who were looking for someone to follow and a place to belong.

In the Kingdom of God blessings do not always come in the way we think. Sometimes as **crazy** as it may seem, God's blessings can come to us through our times of **greatest suffering and pain**, through our times of **greatest fear and anxiety**, through our greatest times of **unexpected upheaval** in our lives. What I would like to do today for a moment is have you turn to someone—preferably someone other than the person you came to church with—and tell them about a time when you felt **God's blessing** upon your life. I am not talking about the *'happy'* times necessarily, I am talking about a time when you might have been at your **lowest low**, or **feeling down and out**, or when you were feeling at your **most weak and vulnerable** and life was closing in around you. These are the times when God's blessing can have the biggest impact on your life. Maybe it was the time when all you could do was to pray for God's blessing and God's presence was **all you had**. Maybe you were just like the people following Jesus that day. The

ones who were looking for someone to follow and a place to belong. The ones were looking for some nugget of hope. The ones who were looking for **hope** and a *blessing* to hang on to and Jesus gave it to them—first. (***I will give you a minute to do this.***)

You see, **that** is what the Kingdom of God is like. God *blesses* us everyday folks. Those of us who are in the **greatest need**, those of us the **world looks down upon**, those of us who are **mourning**, those of us who are **willing to pay the price** to be persecuted for the kingdom. If God shows up here blessing you and me when we are at our **lowest low**, if God's grace and mercy are with us when we need it **most**, God's grace and mercy will **surely** be with us in the '*happy*' times as well.

Blessings, unexpected, nearly inconceivable, from a God who **loves you** more than you will know. Blessings from our God who **delights** in us, blessings from a God who sent His one and only Son to **suffer and die** for us, blessings beyond our **wildest dreams**. Rejoice and be glad for our **reward** will be great in heaven. So when the time comes for **us** to join our **loved** ones and our **beloved** saints, Ardyce and Joan, who have gone before us this year, we, **too**, will know our true greatest joy and '*happiness*', beyond **anything** we have known here on earth, have been fulfilled. All **thanks** be to God. **Amen**