

Sunday, February 17, 2019

Jeremiah 17:5-10

I Corinthians 15:12-20

Luke 6:17-26

Blessed by God with Dignity

What does it mean to be happy today, that is to have happiness? It depends you might say on short term, long-term or even asking what is happiness to you. For children happiness could come from something as simple as eating two different kinds of ice cream. Some adults might think that happiness is from winning a lottery so that money is not a problem for the rest of their lives. Still others just don't seem to be happy at all. A mental wellness check asks are you happy: sometime, part of the time, always or not at all at any time. How would you answer this? Some of us might say I'm happy most of the time because of and list why or qualify this by stating I'm happy sometimes because of what another person shares with you. Just how happy are you?

Jesus was teaching a large crowd of people—people from all over Judea, Jerusalem from Tyre and Sidon. They came to hear and to be healed of their diseases. And those who had evil spirits were cured. People who tried to touch Jesus were healed as his power was emanating all around him. Then he looked at the disciples and started teaching. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are they that mourn. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are they who thirst for justice. Blessed are you when persecuted. Blessed are you when you suffer. Be glad and rejoice for your reward is great in heaven.

Then Simon Peter said, "Are we supposed to write this down?" And Andrew asked, "Are we supposed to know this?" And James asked, "Will we have a test on this?" And Phillip said, "I don't have any paper." And Bartholomew asked, "Do we have to turn this in?" And John said, "The other disciples didn't have to learn this." And Matthew asked, "Can I go to the boys' room?" And Judas asked, "What does this have to do with real life?" Then one of the Pharisees who was present asked to see Jesus' lesson plan and inquired of Jesus, "Where is your objectives and lesson plan?" And Jesus wept. Just what was Jesus trying to tell them?

Have you ever traveled to a city with subway systems you will soon realize that the trains and their tracks do not all run at the same depth. Some lines are deeper underground than others. At some junctures, therefore, one line runs below another, and for the commuter who is making connections,

this means going up or down flights of stairs as needed. Sometimes we might consider this a hassle but when we understand the efficiency of subways under the streets and how quickly these trains enable people to move about in the city, it is simply a minor thing to do—climb up or down to get to your next train and eventually your destination.

So, too, with the intersection of Heaven and Earth: the intersection occurs at several levels. At the one level, there is the Incarnation itself -- Heaven and Earth intersect in Jesus Christ. At another level, we see the angels and the shepherds, the star and the Magi, the crowds around Jesus -- Heaven and Earth intersect by contact with one another, though always at Heaven's initiative. And, at another level still, we look to the stories of Jesus and find that he has performed miracles- water to wine, healed many, and find the teachings of Jesus with the people of that time. He tells the people that he is the son of God and fearing for his life, walks into ministry of being with the people. He drives out evil spirits, he heals people from sickness and preaches the good news of the kingdom of God. The people are crowding around him wherever he goes and they are wanting to hear his message.

Yet the words we have just shared still intersect with us today. For we can imagine Jesus sitting and telling his disciples what they need to hear. We can imagine them listening and it is not really sinking in. And why should it? What Jesus is teaching just does not seem relevant yet it is one of the most important teachings he shares. How to know you are blessed and to fully experience happiness. It is the intersection of ethic and lifestyle that calls us to examine ourselves and what it means to be blessed today. But sometimes we miss seeing the blessings because we get too hung up on something that is self-focused.

Leith Anderson tells the story of having grown up in New York City and was an avid fan of the old Brooklyn Dodgers. One day his father took him to a World Series game between the Dodgers and the Yankees. He was so excited, and he just knew the Dodgers would trounce the Yankees. Unfortunately, the Dodgers never got on base, and his excitement was shattered. Years later he was engrossed in a conversation with a man who was a walking sports almanac. Leith told him about the first major league game he attended and added, "It was such a disappointment. I was a Dodger fan' and the Dodgers never got on base." The man said, "You were there? You were at the game when Don Larsen pitched the first perfect game in all of World Series history" Leith replied, "Yeah, but uh, we lost." He then realized that he had been so caught up in his team's defeat that he missed out on the fact that he was a witness to a far greater page of history.

What is going on down your street? Or near you? We may be so caught up in the need to be with people today and the friends that surround us, that we miss out on a far greater page in the story of our Christianity. Look around you. How is God blessing you? What is it that is happening in our community? What is it that is happening down the street at your neighbor's house, or local arena or school? What is your spouse trying to tell you? What are your children sharing with you? Is God pitching a perfect game in the world series of our neighborhood and we simply are missing out because we are so invested in our team?

Jesus says to his disciples, blessed are those who society looks at differently- the poor, hungry, grieving or lost, or persecuted because of me.

Just reflect upon the people who are in despair and crying around us. Most of these cries go unheard. The noise of our self-oriented culture is drowning them out and they are dying. The world needs the merciful that is we need someone who will identify with us. Someone who will hear our cry, listen, have empathy, and care. We all need to have an attitude of mercy and to be the recipients of such an attitude! As Shakespeare said:

The quality of mercy is not strained; It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest, It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes.

You are blessed by God through His Son Jesus Christ as the Spirit continues to guide and protect you in life. Are you living as God calls you to live and focus outwardly assisting others as you grow in your faith? True happiness begins when you freely give of yourselves for Jesus' sake for you are blessing those who see your faithfulness to service Christ as you show and share your love. With dignity and hope bless others in Jesus' name for you are the light of Christ whom Christ calls his faithful disciples.

PRAYER

God of grace and mercy we praise you and thank you for these blessings. Help us to realize the depth of Christ's teachings so that we might focus on who we can be as he leads and guides us to fully live and love others as his disciples, without counting the cost. Amen.