

Happy Are They!

Text: Micah 6:1-8

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (Series A. 4th after Epiphany) Ps.15

Matthew 5:3-12

***Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.***

Let us pray:

Some of you have watched the TV show *Survivor*. This popular TV real life game show is watched by millions of people around the world. Imagine putting 16 people together from different backgrounds - trying to survive together and at the same time competing against one another for individual survival.

After each round, the participants meet together to cast their votes to see who will be dismissed from the group. It can be for any number of reasons – such as I think you're not pulling your weight, or you are too old, too selfish, too uncooperative or simply because I don't like your face.

The ultimate goal is not to get voted out. And the way to survive is to make sure that there are people on your side – alliances are made – and broken – leaving behind a trail of betrayal and suspicion. This is real life played out in a game show.

That's perhaps the reason why *Survivor* has been so popular – it brings out the *best* and *worst* in people – more often the worst than the best. The winner is not the person who is *kind* and *considerate*, but who makes friends, uses them and then turns against them.

The winner is not the person who is the *better* or *nicer* but the one who is *ruthless* and *hurtful*, who has *no feelings* for the others. One person who was asked about his view of the show nailed it on the head when he said, "*It's sorry that our society is this way, but the people who are conniving and back-stabbing are the ones who make it.*"

Unlike the movies where the scriptwriter controls the plot and good triumphs over evil. In *Survivor*, no one controls the plot and how it ends. It is a sad commentary on the way the world is.

As we think about what it means to be *happy* or *blessed* we might say --

- ❖ Blessed are those who are rich.
- ❖ Blessed are the famous.
- ❖ Blessed are the powerful.
- ❖ Blessed are those who have the determination and ruthlessness to eliminate everything that hinders the fulfillment of their dreams.

For most part, our view of happiness depends so much on our circumstances and environment. For a young woman *true happiness* might be to find the right man, to marry and have a family.

For teenagers, *true happiness* is getting their first car, but not any car, they want certain car that is attractive and faster. Happiness is a common desire for all of us. Yet, so few people seem to have true happiness as a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow – *the elusive, the unattainable, the impossible*.

Happiness is a goal that we all strive for, but when that goal is reached, we realize that there is always something else that would make us truly happy. I'm sure you can think of things that you would like to see changed in your life so that you can be truly happy.

So, we go about arranging – and re-arranging – our environment and circumstances – so that we will be happy. On this basis, people have assumed that, if they are unhappy, it is because of this wretched washing machine, this wretched person I am living with...

They believe that they will become happy by changing their lot in some way. It becomes a never-ending quest. Happiness, we assume, must be fun and laughter and expressing our own personalities – free from *suffering, pain, sorrow* and *hardship*.

The *Sermon on the Mount*, is recorded in Matthew as the first public act of Jesus. This week we hear the *Beatitudes* in concert with the words of Micah, the Psalmist, and Paul speaking to the church in Corinth, all giving an outline and direction in the ways in which to follow God as God wills and, from the Gospel, to become followers of Jesus more fully.

They name our blessings and the corresponding reward for faithfulness. Jesus makes it known, that we are blessed in the first part of his sermon so that we are uplifted. As his teachings continue, we know we will be embraced and sustained by these blessings whenever life turns difficult as long as we are doing all we can to live in the spirit of these states of being. Yet a part of this lesson may be overlooked.

It's no wonder that we can't ever say that we have reached our goal – true happiness. There is nothing wrong with the desire to be happy, there is everything wrong with the way we often go seeking it.

And that's exactly what Jesus is talking about today in the Sermon on the Mount when he talks about true happiness. There are eight sections of the Beatitudes in Matthews Gospel, but due to time I will focus on only one. He says,

Blessed are the poor in spirit:

We would hardly regard 'the poor in spirit' as "happy" because they are aware of how much their sinfulness is out of control; their faith often wavers; they lack the spiritual resources to cope with the upsets in life and easily become depressed and miserable. *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

These *Beatitudes*, or state of blessedness, are qualities of life that describe what we are to actively work toward as we humbly submit ourselves to the will of God. These eight *Beatitudes* are not describing eight different groups of people, but rather the states of being that we each may manifest within our lives, the attributes of true discipleship, true Christianity.

Can you see that Jesus' definition of what it means to be blessed / happy doesn't depend on us and what is happening around us? The "*happy*" sayings of Jesus – the Beatitudes – present us with a whole new idea of what it means to be happy. True happiness has to do with knowing God, belonging to God's Kingdom, being a part of God's family.

You might say that this is hardly a popular view, especially when worldly happiness depends so much on money, a house, the right car, and being free from sickness, pain, death and anything that upsets our "happiness".

But Jesus was one for making true statements. True happiness is to be found in God, and nowhere else. The fact is that we don't find happiness by seeking happiness. When we find God, we discover a deep level of happiness. Dr. Phil says: *We cannot fix internal issue with external solution!*

St. Augustine said ... "*The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in You*" True happiness is to be found in God.

In the middle of all the difficulties, living out our Christian faith; when we are sad and upset; when we are despondent and depressed; when others reject us and ridicule us for our faith or for sticking up for what we believe is right; when we are trying to show mercy and love or bring about peace and we are told to butt out; God meets us, he strengthens us, he comforts, he helps us endure, he gives us the courage to move on.

However difficult in the moments in our own times of discomfort, distress, and even despair, it is through all of life's experiences, that we can seek to discover opportunities to become a blessing to and for others.

George Matheson was a great preacher and hymn writer who lost his sight at an early age. He thought of his blindness as his thorn in the flesh, as his personal cross. For several years, he prayed that his sight would be restored. Like most of us, he believed that personal happiness would come to him only after the handicap was gone, and his sight is restored.

But then, one day God sent him a new insight: The creative use of his handicap could actually become his personal means of achieving happiness! So, Matheson went on to write: "My God, I have never thanked you for my thorn. I have thanked you for my roses, but not once for my thorn.

I have been looking forward to a world where I shall get compensation for my cross, but I have never thought of the cross itself as a present glory. Teach me the glory of my cross. Teach me the value of my thorn." George Matheson had found God's kind of happiness - the kind of happiness that is not only a future hope, but also a reality in the here and now experience.

Paul the Apostle writes: *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God.* [1 Corinthians 1:27-29]

That's the kind of happiness that enabled the apostle Paul to write to the Philippians from his prison cell, "*Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!*" (4:4). That's the secret of true happiness!

You may be suffering a great deal from sickness; chronic pain, you may be persecuted for doing what you consider the right thing; you may be upset about your own weakness of faith; you may even be upset by those who have failed to show love toward you; whatever the case, you can still "*happy*" in the knowledge that you are one of God's precious children, that he sent his Son to die for you, and that when all is said and done, there is a place for you in heaven where there will be no more unhappiness.

**This is the kind of "blessedness" or "happiness" that
no circumstance or person can take away from us.**

Amen.