

HAPPINESS NOW SERIES[1]
Happy Already?
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Easter 2 (3/30/2008) Sunshine Cathedral
9 AM & 10:30 AM
1 Peter 1.3-4, 6-8; John 20.19-23

My great-aunt Gladys went through a superstitious phase in mid-life where she was always looking for signs to predict how things would turn out. She decided that her happiness depended on assurances that things would go her way. She convinced herself that she could only be happy if her children developed the sort of character that she found honorable.

So, Aunt Gladys decided to test my older cousin one day. She went in my cousin's bedroom, and on his desk she placed a rosary, a silver dollar, a bottle of Crown Royal, and some naughty post-cards of nearly nude men on the beach. Aunt Gladys hid in my cousin's closet waiting for him to come home from school.

Aunt Gladys peered through the crack in the closet door to see which item my cousin would first notice and pick up. If he grabbed the rosary, he'd become a priest, and that would please my great-aunt. If he grabbed the silver dollar, he'd become a successful business man, and that would be pretty great too. If he grabbed the bottle of booze, he'd grow up to have a drinking problem, and that would make my great-aunt sad. And if he grabbed the risqué beefcake postcards, he'd be gay.

My cousin finally came home from school, went to his room and threw his books on the bed and then noticed the assortment of items on his desk. He walked over, put the rosary on like a necklace, dropped the silver dollar in his pocket, took a big swig out of the whiskey bottle and started ogling the naughty post-cards. Stunned, my great-aunt Gladys shouted out loud from the closet, "Mother of God he's going to be a congressman!"

In the New Testament book of Ephesians (2.5-6), the writer says that God "raised us up with Christ, and seated us with Christ in the heavens..." Now there is plenty in the book of Ephesians with which I take issue, but that one statement is very intriguing to me. It says something profound about resurrection and what it means for us.

God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Christ in the heavens. To this writer, resurrection isn't a one time event that happened to one person. On the contrary, the resurrection of Christ symbolizes our shared resurrection; and it isn't a resurrection that will happen for us one day, but one that has happened for us, already! God has ALREADY raised us up. We have ALREADY been uplifted.

If this writer is correct, and I believe that he has stumbled onto something that is profoundly true, then the fullness of life is available to us in this sacred moment. The fullness of life doesn't depend on the future, or on things going a certain way. The fullness of life isn't something that is conditional; it is our present reality. It is available to us now. It is part of who we are; it is part of the divine plan for us. We have been raised up with Christ and we are seated with Christ in a heavenly state...right now!

So when we think that our happiness is in the future waiting for certain conditions, we are mistaken. As resurrection people, we have been lifted up to the presence and power of joy already. It's ours in the now; we are happy already, even though we may not know it. The key is discovering our innate, inner happiness and embracing it fully.

We are offered this same lesson in today's epistle reading. "Blessed be God...by whose great mercy we have been given a new birth into a living hope..."

We have been given. The hope is ours; it's available to us right here and right now. These words are written to people who have struggles and fears and disappointments, but the difficulties don't define them nor can they rob them of their right to experience joy in life. The writer of 1 Peter says that our divine inheritance is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading..."

The writer even gives a wonderful example...he says, "Although you have not seen Jesus, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy!"

The people to whom those words are written had been expecting Jesus' return, as had the generation before them. It didn't happen. But this writer says that being wrong about Jesus' triumphal return is no reason to give up on joy. Even though you don't see him, still you love him and you experience an indescribable and glorious joy.

The gospel reading says that the apostles experienced Jesus beyond his execution. The breath of Christ invigorated them, and their hope and joy were renewed.

If we had read a few verses more, we would have seen that Thomas was out and missed the experience, but he did say that if he could have that experience he would believe...he placed conditions on his happiness, and it was therefore delayed. However, eventually the experience is repeated and this time Thomas gets in on it. And Jesus says to him, "Thomas, you believe because you see me? Happy are those who have not seen and yet still believe." This, again, is a great word of encouragement to people who had hoped that Jesus would return and set things right. Their expectations were not met, but they have a choice. They are free to believe in possibilities even when things aren't going their way. They are free to embrace happiness long before they see any of their conditions met.

If happiness depends on things going according to plan or us getting our way, then happiness may be elusive. But the biblical witness is that we can be happy without waiting for conditions to be met.

Sure, we can have goals. Of course we want a healthy relationship, a better job, to go back and finish that degree, to lose a few pounds...whatever the desire may be. But we don't have to wait for those things to experience happiness. We can choose to believe in the Source of joy right here. The source of joy is part of us; we are made in its image. We are filled with its spirit. Getting our way isn't necessary to experience joy; all we have to do is remember who we really are and then joy becomes our natural state.

We have been raised up with Christ.

We have been given new birth to a living hope.

We are lifted up to our natural state of joy when we remember who we are and choose to live in the power of that truth.

We can be happy now...in fact, in God's reality, we already are. It's the truth of our being...we have been raised up with Christ and we are seated in the joyous and heavenly places with Christ.

As you read Robert Holden's book, *Happiness Now!*...you will learn about the Unconditioned Self...the real you that is made in the divine image of perfection, wholeness and joy. The real you is whole, perfect and complete, and therefore must be joyous and abundantly blessed. As we learn to embrace and celebrate the real us, we will discover that we have been raised to heavenly places with Christ. Your heaven, your joy, is part of you already. By embracing it, nothing can rob you of the divine happiness that you already are.

Jesus breathed on them and said, "Receive the holy breath, the holy spirit, the spirit of wholeness, the spirit of abundant life and perfect joy." Receive it! It's already yours...no matter what is going on around you, this perfect spirit is already yours. This is the good news. Amen.

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I receive the spirit of wholeness.
I receive the spirit of abundant life.
I receive the spirit of perfect joy.
I am made in the image of divine joy.
I embrace the joy that I am.
I choose to be happy now.
And so it is!

[1] Series based on the topics covered in Robert Holden's book, *Happiness Now!: Timeless Wisdom for Feeling Good FAST* (Hay House, 1998; 2007)