

Sunshine Cathedral MCC

Learning To Be Happy...No Matter What!

by Rev. Durrell Watkins , M.A., M.Div. (April 6th, 2008)

I'll never forget the time that my great-aunt Gladys went on vacation. She went to some seaside vacation spot and she decided that she wanted a tan...without tan lines. So, she went up to the roof of her hotel and began sunbathing in the all-together. After about 10 minutes of sun-worshipping, she was startled when the assistant manager appeared on the roof clearly feeling uncomfortable. Aunt Gladys reached over for her towel and covered herself with it while the embarrassed assistant manager said, "Ma'am, we don't mind if you use the roof for sunbathing, but you really must wear a swim-suite." Aunt Gladys, amused by the assistant manager's apparent prudery, scolded him: "Young man, what difference could it possibly make if I'm wearing anything or not...up here on the roof, no one can see me." To which the assistant manager replied, "That's not quite true, Ma'am. You see, you're lying on the dining room skylight."

{Has nothing to do with our topic today, but I will go to great links to make sure you are listening.}

Now for business: I'm not going to talk about the Luke reading today, even though it is one of my favorite gospel stories. Resurrection is experienced in a variety of ways in the New Testament, most of them mystical, and today's story is another example of people experiencing Resurrection in a mystical and life-changing way. But I want to focus on the Apostle Paul this morning...but first, let me set the scene.

Forty years before the birth of Jesus, Julius Caesar died. After his death, he was declared divine, which made his great-nephew and adopted son, Octavian, the son of a god. Octavian ruled as Caesar Augustus, and was the emperor at the time of Jesus' birth.

A tradition developed of emperors being deified after they died, and their heirs were called divine son or the son of god. This imperial cult grew exponentially for a while. The cult of emperor worship even offered "good news." The good news, or "gospel" of the imperial cult was that Caesar, son of a god, was now Lord of the whole world, bringing peace and prosperity and justice to all people throughout the empire. Of course, anyone who disagreed with the propaganda would find themselves in a prison cell or impaled on a stick, but the official word was that it was good news that the divine son Caesar was in charge of a thriving, dynamic, ideal empire.

So, with that in mind, hear these words of the Apostle Paul: *I, Paul...was set apart for the gospel ...about God's son, descended from David according to the flesh, but established as son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Romans 1.1, 3-4)

The reigning Caesar is son of God because the previous Caesar was raised to divine status. Paul says that JESUS is the son of God because God has raised HIM to a cosmic, eternal significance.

Caesar is a divine son because he is descended from previous Caesars. JESUS is the son of God because he is descended from God's servant, David.

Caesar is the Lord of the empire, but Paul says Jesus is OUR Lord.

And Caesar has good news proclaimed about his imperial might, but Paul says that he has been set apart to proclaim good news about Jesus!

Rome's good news is that Caesar is in charge; the good news of Jesus is that nothing outside of ourselves can be in charge of the real us.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a counter-cultural, seditious, in your face, liberating gospel that takes on the powers of oppression and gives hope and dignity and empowerment to those on society's margins.

Rome executed Jesus, but Paul says that he didn't stay dead. He was raised as a *son of God according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection*.

Jesus trumps Caesar, according to Paul. Rome killed Jesus, but Rome didn't get to have the last word. And now all the honors Caesar claims for himself, Paul is attributing to someone Caesar's government killed.

No wonder Paul does so much of his writing from prison!

Paul isn't searching for good news; he's affirming it! Paul imagines divine possibilities right where he is. He even imagines a lordship over against Caesar's...a gospel over against Caesar's...a divine son over against Caesar.

Paul imagines and experiences Resurrection Power and Resurrection Joy in the midst of his lived reality with all of its challenges.

Paul finds good news within himself. He finds that the divine love demonstrated by Jesus Christ can lift him up no matter what the circumstances in his life happen to be.

In fact, Paul said, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." That's Happiness Now! Paul facing prison and execution and tribulation can say, "My happiness doesn't depend on my circumstances and my happiness can't be robbed by my circumstances...I HAVE LEARNED TO BE CONTENT WHATEVER THE CIRCUMSTANCES!!!"

This bible that we love isn't after-life fire insurance. It isn't an escape from reality that we visit once a week in church. The bible is a tool of empowerment to liberate hurting people and to challenge the powers of oppression – whether those powers are external or internal.

On April 3, 1968, the day before his murder, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave the last speech of his life and in that speech he said that he was **happy** to be living in the time that he did. He said he was **happy** to be grappling with the problems that all people have had to struggle with throughout history. In the midst of strife, Dr. King affirmed that he was **happy**.

Dr. King had been harassed by the FBI. He had survived assassination attempts. His family had been threatened. He had been jailed. He knew that fighting for the sanitation workers in Memphis might cost him his life.

He said, "I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land. **And I'm happy**, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." That's Happiness Now! It is the wise and enlightened soul who can observe all hell breaking loose and still affirm, "I am happy." *I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.*

Robert Holden tells us today, "No matter how low, hurt hopeless...fearful, or how awful you feel, the potential to experience peace and happiness never goes away. Just as clouds in the sky can eclipse the sun but not destroy it, so too can fear and pain eclipse your happiness but not destroy it. The potential for happiness is with you permanently." This is the good news. Amen.

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**I am happy now.
I am release all anxiety now.
I am fearless now.
I will be happy...
whatever the circumstances.
I see and seize miraculous possibilities.
I believe in Good News now.
And so it is!**

“It’s ironic that the only joy you ever experience while pursuing happiness is when you very occasionally allow yourself to rest, relax, and stop pursuing happiness completely. Think how fearless you would be, how creative and at peace you would be, and how free you would be to enjoy the world more fully if you were to stop pursuing happiness and simply start accepting and allowing happiness to happen. Happiness is not in things; happiness is in *you*.” – Robert Holden, PhD