

"Happy!"

Matthew 5:1-12 (Micah 6:8)

*Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you know what happiness is to you
Because I'm happy
Clap along if you feel like that's what you wanna do*

Those, of course, are the words of the refrain of Pharell Williams's giant hit song, "Happy", first released on November 21, 2013. Even though a church choir is singing along in the video of the song, it probably won't make any of our hymnbooks any time in the near future. But, it is an enjoyable song, that has a beat to make us move our feet, and create a sense or mood of happiness. I will confess, however, that as it is with many songs of the pop music genre, I am not always sure what the lyrics mean. If anyone would like to help me out with this problem, I will gladly accept. But I mention the song not because of wanting to do a critical review of Pharell's writing. I use it because of its theme, its title. When the American Bible Society first published their contemporary translation of the Bible during the 1960s, they took heat from some religious circles because of the way they translated the Beatitudes, that is, Matthew 5:1-12. "Today's English Version" translated "blessed" as "happy". The Greek word can be translated as "happy", or "blessed", or "fortunate". Up to this point in time, however, not many were ready for that word to be used in place of "blessed". Is it perhaps because "blessed" sounds a little more like something God does for us, rather than simply make us "happy"? It has a holier sound to it, I always thought, than just being happy. Christians can be joyful always, we have said, even if they are sad. And it has been our thinking that happiness is fleeting. It comes and goes. One day we are happy, but the next day we may be sad. It seems, though, that Jesus deliberately uses this word in his teaching moments with his disciples, as surely, they will come to know, that God defines them as happy people even though they may be living in an unhappy state of life or frame of mind. It remains true for us this day as well, as we hear our God declare who we are. Happy people, blessed people, fortunate people.

We were given a name at birth. A lot of attention and thought goes into naming a child. We bear that name for the rest of our lives (First and Middle names) most generally, and we are identified by our names. God also knows our names, and he, too, identifies us as his own children who are marked with the cross at baptism. It is in the splash of water that cleanses us of our sinful existence, that God claims us now as his own redeemed children because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. On the cross, God bears all that destroys his desires for our lives. Christ Jesus bears our failures, our illnesses, our injuries of body, mind, spirit and soul. God takes upon himself in Jesus the brokenness that invades relationships of couples, of families, of friends, of communities, of nations. God knows the circumstances of our lives, and all that surrounds us, and through the cross he pours out upon us in abundance his grace and mercy. We are blessed because of the cross on which our Lord and Savior died in our behalf. We are made happy through his love that never fails nor ends. We are fortunate that we have a God who cares so very much for us.

God reveals his power through grace and mercy. This is so contrary to power defined by the world. His love is so unlike that of the world. His kindness is for all, certainly not so in life of the world. His love is unconditional, unlike love practiced in the world. He looks at us through the lens of the cross, seeing us in any situation of life, in any state of life and whatever existence we are in at any moment. Through that lens of the cross, he comes to us with a full measure of his kindness, justice and love. He reveals his power through humility as Jesus comes to serve us before being served, to bring us honor before being honored, to grant us a richness of life while giving up his wealth for us. He blesses people like us who know how poor in spirit we are. He brings happiness even to those who mourn as he assures them of his life prepared in his everlasting presence. Those who hunger and thirst for justice, those who lack mercy, those who remain pure in heart and spirit, the meek and mild, those who seek peace and those who bear the ridicule and persecution of the world, are blessed, given a "room without a roof", heaven itself, and the truth of a love that overcomes all evil. How blessed we are to have the fortune of a love that extends far beyond the happiness of this world and life!

Is there an alternative definition of happy or being blessed, or fortunate? Absolutely there is! It isn't just the Championship game of football, it is the "**Super Bowl!**" Happy are they whose team wins! Happy are they who play because they will make a fortune! What makes people happy in life? More money in the pocket ranks near the top. If we cannot have the best of life, sometimes we will settle for at least having better in life. Being the greatest brings smiles to the hearts of many. We won't settle for good if we can have better or best. Power excites people, and there are so many ways we look for it. Imagine people really needing to buy cars that have 600 or more horsepower! Power comes in having more than others, having better than others, being stronger than others. Power has privileges. Just like wealth. The more we have of it, the more we expect from it. Why are some jobs better than others? It may have a lot to do with salaries, but also with benefits and pensions. Happier in retirement are those who have a great pension.

I confess that I like lots of horsepower. But I, like you, need to confess that we, too, seek out the things of the world thinking these will bring us happiness. If we have lots now, we say we are blessed. But would we be as quick to say we are blessed if we had little like so many others of the world? Are we happy to give away so others may have more? Do we see how fortunate we are having so many gifts from above? Probably not that quickly. We will say we deserve many things because we worked hard for them. Our efforts reward us. If wealth makes us happy, then why are we so reluctant to share it so others might be happy, too? If we live in a happy life, why would we ignore the plight of those unhappy? We, who follow Jesus, still battle with the world's definition of blessed, and happy, and fortunate. Are the happiest people the greatest, the best, the wealthiest, the richest, the most powerful, the strongest? Are we happy even if we have little of the world in our pockets?

Jesus went up the mountain and sat down. When his disciples came to him he began to teach them. It was thought that being on a mountain made a person closer to God. This place is our mountain. When we gather in worship, hearing the Word, and receiving the sacraments, we sense closeness with God as well. In this time and place our Lord teaches us his Word and desires, fills us with his holy presence through the power of the Holy Spirit, touches our hearts and minds with his saving love, and

sends us out into the world demonstrating his teachings in the way we live, think, act, speak and in what we do. We are the definition of happy. We are those who know that having much earns us little favor with God, but needing much from him attracts his mercy and kindness. We come here acknowledging our need for being happy, or blessed, through Christ Jesus, who showed the world for all time God's definition of blessedness.

Why did Jesus need to give the disciples these introducing words of his Sermon on the Mount? Why did Micah need to let his people know what the Lord required of them, and us? God's people forgot whose people they were. God's people forget that they are to live the same way out there on Thursday as they do in here on Sunday. God's people forget others who need to know they are blessed and made happy. You and I live in ways at times that may be more defined by the world's way of life, and not of God. We need to come to the mountain. We need to gather around God's words of judgment and mercy, law and Gospel. We need to remember our identity as baptized children of God, and to be fortified for the week through the holy meal of our salvation. We need the strength of the saints before us, with us now, and those yet to be with us. We need to know how great is the love of God that he has heart for all people across the globe who live in the poverty of body as well as spirit and soul. Then, in Christ's very own words and actions, we go to serve before being served, to love before being loved, to bless because we are blessed. Happy are they who live in the kingdom of heaven on earth. Blessed are those who receive mercy and kindness. Happy are those who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God. And blessed, happy and fortunate are those who come into the presence of people like you and me who rejoice and are glad. Our reward is not on earth or from the world. It is in Christ Jesus who blesses us forever. Amen.