



LESSONS for LIFE

Sunday, February 17, 2008 11:00 a.m.

Happiness Now

IMAGE OF GOD

Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS:

A THOUGHT FROM ROBERT HOLDEN'S YOGI

LESSON: GENESIS 1: 27

GOSPEL: JOHN 1: 4 – 7A

During the season of Lent we are in the middle of a sermon series called Happiness Now. It is based on a book by Robert Holden called Happiness Now.

Friends who know me really well say that I have at least two fatal flaws. The first one is that I have absolutely no sense of direction. If anyone can get lost while going from point A to point B it is I. The second fatal flaw is that I am always convinced that I know where I am going. When you put these two flaws together it spells trouble and the occasional argument.

A few months ago when I was in Fort Lauderdale, I decided to go shopping for a GPS system. I had heard about them and I wanted one. I went to this store and they had one on special. It had been taken away by someone and they brought it back so it was open, it was cheaper than most and I decided to buy it. It was one of the best investments I have ever made. 'A' it will get me where I am going and anytime I am lost all I have to do is turn it on and it will get me back on track again. I absolutely love that GPS.

What I have learned though, about the GPS system is that there are three things required to make it work: The first is some kind of external signal. When you turn on the GPS it has to connect into that external signal. The second is that I have to know where I am going and I have to be able to type in the destination. So if I know the address or the postal code or the cross street, lots of options, I have to type it into the system. The third thing is, I then have to follow the directions starting from where I am, from where I'm starting from.

Now I think that this system has some spiritual lessons for us. Number one: While I believe that we have much wisdom within us, I also believe that there is an external system available to us, ...of wisdom around us in others, wisdom in tradition, wisdom in sacred scriptures, wisdom in spirit, the divine, the holy, the higher power, there is much wisdom around us. If we can tap into that wisdom, that signal, on a regular basis, it will help us get to our destination. I think that church, at its best, can help remind us of that system.

Secondly, I have to know my destination. Where do I want to end up? Today, the destination we are looking at is called happiness. The scripture says: *Rejoice always, again I say rejoice.* Jesus said, *I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly.* As ancient as the writings of Ecclesiastes the author said, *I know that there is nothing better for us than to be happy and enjoy our lives.* So, destination: happiness today... typing it in to the GPS.

Finally, I have to start and follow those directions from where I am, from my beginning point, from where I start. Therein you have a choice this morning. You can define where to start by what you don't have. You can say - I am starting from the place where I don't have a partner. That is why I am not happy. I am starting from the place where I don't have the best job. I am starting from the place where I'm having trouble in my relationship. I am starting from the place where I have an illness or a challenge in my life. You can define your starting place by what you don't have. Now, it is very easy to do that because around us there are all kinds of influences saying to you ...why you will be better off once you buy this, you'll be better off once you have this, you'd be better off if you looked like this, or if you were with this person or you'd be better off if your partner was different or better - or someone else. (Laughter) You'd be better off with all of these things you do not have and so you can define your starting place there if you want. The challenge is, if you decide to start your place there, then happiness simply becomes a momentary experience of joy when you get a hold of that thing for just a few seconds or a few moments or until you realize there is something else you don't have; a momentary joy; whereas the scriptures talk to us about happiness being a way of life, an attitude of life, constantly.

Now in the first reading this morning from Holden, he talks about two birds and he said the first bird is looking for happiness, wants it and goes searching for it outside, out there in the world.

If you were here last Sunday, you knew that I misplaced my glasses or pretended to. I had my glasses here and I went looking for them... over here - couldn't find them, over here ... couldn't find them ...I wondered where John misplaced them again... couldn't find them! And as long as I looked for those glasses outside, I never would have found them. It wasn't until I realized that they were right here ... all along, that I found my glasses.

So, that first bird that says *I want happiness* and goes searching for it is unlikely to find it as a way of life. Now, Holden talks about that first bird as being our ego, our individual self. I love the way he defines 'ego'. He defines ego as Everything Good Outside. When we have this attitude that everything good that we need, that we want, that we have to earn is all outside of us... that is our 'ego' ...and we go looking outside to find it. He also defines 'ego' as Edging God Out; that when we go looking outside for everything good then we push God away. Ego... Everything Good Outside, Edging God Out. He says that ego is like a thirsty fish swimming in the water - but thirsty - and not knowing that all it has to do is to take in the water that is there already.

The second bird in Holden's book is a bird who says that happiness is already here inside me. I already have it. Searching out there I won't find it. Reconnecting with it in here will help me to live it, to experience it. He says that no matter what the circumstances are externally, no matter what is going on around us, nothing in the world can make us happy. ...A moment... yeah. Nothing in the world can make us unhappy. That nothing outside of ourselves, can make us happy, no circumstances no events... can determine our happiness.

Victor Frankl was a psychiatrist who experienced the concentrations camps and he observed humanity in the midst of that experience. After he left the concentration camps he wrote a book and developed a theory called Logotherapy. In that theory he says that no matter what the event is that happens in your life between that event and your reaction there is a space of time for you to make a decision and that you make the decision about your reaction; that it's not automatic. You have the space, even if it is a just a partial

second or two, to make the decision about what is going to happen in your life. No matter what the circumstances are - as awful they can be - you still have that opportunity to make a decision about how those external events are going to impact you. Now there are lots of things that can be influencers on your happiness, no question. They can influence you positively or they can influence you negatively, no question. In the next few weeks we are going to spend some time talking about the positive influencers and what meaning they can have and how we should handle them and a lot of time talking about the potential negative influencers and how we are to handle those in our lives. How do we remain happy in a world of war? How do we remain happy in the midst of poverty? How do we remain happy in the midst of injustice while we work on those things together? Nothing externally can make us or break us in terms of our happiness. Lots of things can influence us positively and negatively but they cannot decide. They are influencers not deciders. Happiness, he says, as he set out, is not a set of circumstances. Happiness is a set of attitudes that we have.

So I want to, very briefly, talk about some attitudes. First of all, ...the core attitude that we start with. The core attitude: You are created in the image of God, the Holy, the Divine, the Higher Power, God in you. That is the basis, that is the foundation with which we begin. Now, so many of us come from a very different place...not good enough, can't work hard to earn it enough; things may have been said by others that have led us on the path of saying we are not good enough. But if we start from the place that you are created in the image of God, the Holy the Divine in you, that is where you start from, that is the foundation. That is the main attitude. Then Holden tells us that there are three ingredients of happiness. There are three parts of this image of God that are placed in us from the very moment we begin to experience life. These three things are the essence of who we are. These are the three things that we need to remember and come back to and live out of all the time. If you leave here today with anything, leave with these four things: I am created in the image of God, God in me and God through me for our world, not just in you. God in me and God through me for our world and then these three ingredients of happiness; these three essences of who you are.

Number one: I AM LOVE.. GOD IS LOVE. WE ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. WE ARE LOVE. The essence of who you are is love. You can live in that essence, in that remembrance all the time and you can respond out of that all the time. Love in me and love through me for our world.

Secondly: PEACE. Jesus said, *My peace I give to you.* Not like the world gives it. *Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let you be afraid. Peace be with you.* The essence of who you are at the very centre, at the very core of who you are is peace and nothing can take that away. Peace in you and peace through you for our world. In all circumstances asking, How can I respond out of peace? Pray that not only we, but also our political leaders respond first out of the place of peace.

Thirdly: JOY. *Rejoice always again I say rejoice.* Joy is placed in you and is at the essence of who you are and nothing can take your joy away. Nothing can steal your joy. Yes, there will be circumstances around that will influence you but they need not take away that place of joy within you. The essence of who you are is love and you are called to live in that and to respond out of that all the time. The essence of who you are is peace and you are called to live in that and respond out of that all the time. The essence of who you are is joy, you are called to live in that and respond out of that all the time. Happiness comes from your reconnecting to those three things no matter what the circumstances are.

Now, I want to come back to that GPS system. I want to change it a little bit to say that GPS stands for God's Positioning System. Number one: connecting with the signal, with that power of God within you and around you that source of wisdom in you and outside of you. Connect with the system. Secondly: type in your destination, where you want to end up and for this series it is called happiness. Thirdly: follow the directions from where you start. Don't start from what you don't have. Don't even start from what the world doesn't even have yet. Start from that knowledge of God and holiness and divinity within

you and around you in our world - holiness in the other in the circumstance. Start from that place of love and peace and joy, consistently and no matter what the world throws at you ... coming back to that place, that essence of who you are.
Amen.