

## Joy ... it's not about the pursuit of happiness

Luke 2:8-11

December 19, 2004

*And today, on the fourth Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of happiness ...*

No ... it's not the candle of happiness, is it?

I cannot promise you that if you welcome Jesus into your life, if you make room in your life for Jesus, you will be happy.

I can promise that if you welcome Jesus into your life, you will have hope. You will have hope, real hope, a clear vision of the tangible and certain future that God will bring into being ... a future, a hope, that you can live for and work for and die for!

I can promise that if you welcome Jesus into your life, you will have peace. You will have peace with God. There will be no need to wonder about what God thinks of you -- you will know. You will know that you belong, you will know that you are loved, you will know that nothing can ever come between you and God. And you will know that God is making peace, that God is reconciling people and nations, that God is preparing the world for shalom. And you will know that anything and everything you may do to make peace is not in vain.

I can promise that if you make room in your life for Jesus, you will be loved. You will be loved ... more deeply, more completely than you have ever been loved. You will be loved absolutely by the One whose love matters. You will be loved with a love that does not waver and does not end.

But I cannot promise that if you make room in your life for Jesus, you will be happy. I cannot promise that if you welcome Jesus into your life, your children will be safe and do well, your job will be secure and fulfilling, your health will be fine. I cannot promise you will never be in want, never be lonely, never know sorrow and grief.

In fact -- in fact! -- I can promise you the opposite! ... I promise you that if you do welcome Jesus into your life, if you do make room in your life for Jesus, you will know much sorrow and much grief!

You will know sorrow and grief because when you welcome Jesus into your life, your eyes are opened. You see injustice for what it is, you see the great suffering of neighbors near and far and you cannot close your eyes! Because of Jesus, you cannot turn away. Because of Jesus you cannot not care.

You will know sorrow and grief because when you make room for Jesus in your life, you make yourself an enemy of a world that rejects Jesus' way. You become an outsider, a puzzle or an object of ridicule to a world that pursues other priorities and esteems other values.

You will know sorrow and grief because when you welcome Jesus into your life, your expectations of yourself are no less than what Jesus asks of you, which is ... everything! You expect more, so much more, of yourself and your family members and your co-workers and your neighbors and your countrymen and your fellow human beings. You are not happy with a half-hearted effort; you are not happy with a token display of kindness; you are not happy with expressions of love and concern that do not lead to

committed action, whatever the cost, whatever the risk.

You will know sorrow and grief because when you make room for Jesus in your life, you recognize sin. You see it. You see the effects of pride and envy and greed and lust and anger and apathy ... in yourself, and in everybody else ... and it breaks your heart!

I cannot promise you a happy life ... The angel did not say:

*Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you,  
which will bring great happiness to all the people.*

The angel did say:

*Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you,  
which will bring great joy to all the people.*

I can promise you this: when you welcome Jesus into your life, when you make room in your life for Jesus, you will be filled with joy!

Happiness and joy are two very different things ...

- happiness is having a child be safe and do well ... joy is having a child
- happiness is being praised for your singing ... joy is singing
- happiness is winning the soccer game ... joy is playing soccer
- happiness is catching a fish ... joy is fishing
- happiness is receiving a gift ... joy is giving a gift
- happiness is living a long and healthy life ... joy is being alive
- happiness is a God who blesses ... joy is a God who is

The promise made in Jesus' birth is God-with-us ... and God-with-us is joy. *When I have you, Lord, what else could I want?*

Happiness is something we pursue. We consider it among our dearest rights -- life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. We run after happiness, seeking/pursuing the things, the relationships, the occupations, the pastimes that will make us happy. Sometimes we are successful, at least to some degree, for some period of time. But oftentimes happiness remains elusive, something just beyond our grasp.

Happiness is something we pursue, but joy comes to us ...

*I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people.*

Happiness is something we achieve, but joy is something we receive ...

*Joy to the world! The Lord is come;  
Let earth receive her King!*

Happiness is fleeting and temporary; joy is permanent. Happiness is relative, something we have more or less; joy is complete and full and absolute. Once you have it, really have it, joy will never leave you! I know ... because joy has not left me. I have known sadness and grief in my life. I do know sadness and grief ... but joy remains!

*I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people.  
Your Savior has been born -- Christ the Lord!*

Emmanuel! God is with us! Jesus does save! Jesus is Lord! May you be filled with joy this Christmas ... because you have made room in your life for Jesus!