

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, January 29, 2023

The Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany

Festal Eucharist

11 a.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Prisca Lee-Pae, *Associate for Pan-Asian Ministry*

on

Matthew 5:1-12

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Happiness taught by Jesus

“Delayed gratification.” It is a concept that has recently been highlighted in childhood education and parenting field. It is said that for a child to know how to wait patiently for his or her needs is a crucial key to developing into a successful adult. The reason why this is important in children's education can be thought of in many ways, but above all, it is because, unlike in the past where you learn this about life as you grow up, it has become a virtue that is difficult to obtain without conscious effort in modern society. It is a radical shift in our society where we have lost the virtue of perseverance.

When we had a big family with many siblings, we had no choice but to wait for our turn, and when we had to share one TV in the living room, we couldn't always watch the show we wanted. We couldn't watch “Tom and Jerry” any time we wanted. The time for cartoons on TV was fixed, and we couldn't watch it if it overlapped with our father's News time. Remember sending a love letter and waiting in anticipation for a reply? We don't have that kind of romance and thrill any more. Everything is instant, with a push of a button or swap of your finger.

Due to the convenience gained from the development of technology, we enjoy everyday life with increased efficiency and speed, but unfortunately, some of the beautiful emotions and experiences associated with waiting have been stolen from our lives. But more worrisome than that is whether this generation, accustomed to efficiency and speed, would be able to understand and embrace the paradox of achieving victory through the cross and the hope for the coming kingdom of God in the Christian faith. The more I become accustomed to the culture we are living in now, the more I fear that we would unknowingly drift away from the kingdom of God. How does Jesus' teaching about true happiness sound to us? We can instantly snap a picture of what we're seeing and send it to a friend no matter how far away, and often, we get annoyed when a replying text comes a few minutes later than we expected.

Jesus tells us to be happy since we will be comforted, we will inherit the earth, we will be filled, we will receive mercy, we will see God, we will be called children of God. Can we truly be happy according to His words, having hopes for the future, not knowing specifically when, where, and how we will get something? Moreover, now we are poor in spirit, mourn and hunger, persecuted for the sake of righteousness and reviled and uttered all kinds of evil against us falsely? Doesn't this require an enormous capacity for delayed gratification? Or maybe this is a completely different level of satisfaction.

This sermon of Jesus in today's Gospel, teaching us what kind of person is truly happy, does not seem to penetrate our hearts, even after 2,000 years have passed. Can we accept the conditions for happiness that Jesus just listed? Aren't they all conditions that would be more suitable if we add “unhappy” rather than

happy? Those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, those who work for peace, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; We don't think we'll be happy when we become them. Rather, we fear that it would happen to us. And people treat those listed above as naïve, that's not how the world works!

Jesus says NOT that you will be happy, but that you are happy. It's not that you will be blessed, but you are blessed already. This is not a matter of simple gratification delay, but the whole level of satisfaction. Looking at it in a completely different way. The moment we are poor and pure in heart, the moment we mourn, the moment we hunger and thirst for righteousness, the moment we are merciful and meek, the moment we work for peace, the moment we are persecuted for righteousness' sake, the moment we are reviled and uttered all kinds of evil against us falsely on Christ's account, we are already clothed with God's mercy, we are already God's children, and the kingdom of God is ours. Therefore, we can be happy and joyful at this moment when we are persecuted, reviled, and criticized for doing what is right, having sorrow with a pure heart here and now. The happiness Jesus spoke of is not the satisfaction of a later reward, but the happiness of the present moment. If you don't enjoy it now, you won't be able to enjoy it for eternity.

The happiness Jesus speaks of is different from the happiness the world speaks of, in many ways. It is a completely different level of happiness and a different kind of happiness from the conditions of happiness that the world constantly tells us. Happiness in a poor and pure heart, happiness in sorrow, happiness in mercy, happiness in doing what is right and working for peace, happiness in persecution, insult, and reproach for justice and Christ. A person who can enjoy this kind of happiness even for a moment must be a truly blessed one. This happiness is a happiness that cannot be compared to the happiness that the world can give.

How much can we get close to this happiness in our lifetime? Will we be able to taste the state of this happiness before we die, where we can say that I am happy to be insulted, persecuted, and to receive all sorts of accusations with outrageous words? All that pain is not pain but happiness because of Jesus. That pain becomes happiness since we are suffering for Jesus and that happiness is born out of love.

Against our instinctive desire for things that are easy, comfortable, safe and abundant, and to choose to rejoice and be glad in meekness and mourning, being pure and poor in heart, in longing for righteousness, in struggling for peace, in persecution for Jesus. Jesus Christ is saying that we can do that, if we love him, if we have realized his love. And with that very love, he loved us and with that love he willingly took up the cross. And he wants us to enjoy that love as well. And this is the beauty of those who believe in Jesus.

The church is a gathering of beautiful people who can lay down their authority and possessions for the benefit of others and put themselves in a low and humble position to bless others. The church should be the place where those who are pushed out of the world and feel that they have no place to stand in the world can come and encounter these beautiful people. At that moment, the church can change the direction of someone's life and the direction of society. Meeting people who are completely different from the world can be the revelation of a new world.

It is said that one of the surest ways to be happy is to be with happy people. When our church is a gathering of those who enjoy the happiness taught by Jesus, we can deliver that happiness to the world. Are we happy now? Can we make others happy with the happiness taught by Jesus? Asking ourselves these questions, I sincerely pray that in this new year, we will be able to take a step forward as a community that exudes the beauty of Christians.