

July 28, 2002
AM Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Happy?”
Hosea 14:8-9 NLT

8 "O Israel, stay away from idols! I am the one who looks after you and cares for you. I am like a tree that is always green, giving my fruit to you all through the year."

9 Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those who are discerning listen carefully. The paths of the LORD are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in them. But sinners stumble and fall along the way.

I believe we human beings have a perception problem. We often think we have the proper perspective on an issue when in fact we are way off.

There's a charming story that Thomas Wheeler, CEO of the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, tells on himself: He and his wife were driving along an interstate highway when he noticed that their car was low on gas. Wheeler got off the highway at the next exit and soon found a rundown gas station with just one gas pump. He asked the lone attendant to fill the tank and check the oil, then went for a little walk around the station to stretch his legs.

As he was returning to the car, he noticed that the attendant and his wife were engaged in an animated conversation. The conversation stopped as he paid the attendant. But as he was getting back into the car, he saw the attendant wave and heard him say, "It was great talking to you."

As they drove out of the station, Wheeler asked his wife if she knew the man. She readily admitted she did. They had gone to high school together and had dated steadily for about a year.

"Boy, were you lucky that I came along," bragged Wheeler.

"If you had married him, you'd be the wife of a gas station attendant instead of the wife of a chief executive officer."

"My dear," replied his wife, "if I had married him, he'd be the chief executive officer and you'd be the gas station attendant."

Yes, we often think we have the proper perspective on an issue when in fact we are way off. Jesus understood this propensity for us humans to get it wrong. Especially when it comes to things spiritual.

So one day Jesus went up on a mountainside, sat down and began to teach his disciples (and anyone else who wanted to listen). He talked about being happy or blessed. I wonder why? Maybe because so many are unhappy, down and discontented. Maybe it is because too many are looking in all the wrong places for happiness. Worldliness, riches, material possessions, fame, to some life must be one big party – all the time, some use drugs and/or alcohol to feel good. Arthur Schopenhauer wrote, “There is no more mistaken path to happiness than worldliness, revelry, high life.” (Stripe the caterpillar). People think that happiness is getting what you want, being self-reliant, self-confident. The world emphasizes self-expression and self –assurance. I knew someone who believed he could do whatever he put his mind to. He believed in the power of positive thinking. He dressed for success. He had self-confidence...he died before he was 40 years old because of drug and alcohol abuse. I recently read that the very rich and famous Brittany Spears was depressed (So much for riches and fame assuring happiness!). Blaming a break-up with her boyfriend, she admitted to doing too much drinking. It was also reported that her promoters were trying to help her quit smoking. They don’t think it is good for her image. We, with the help of worldly philosophies, have perceived of ways to happiness. But Jesus taught something very different as a way to find happiness. On that day that He sat on a mountainside teaching, He said, (Matt 5:3 NIV) “Blessed (or, “oh how happy) are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Now that is quite different than being self-reliant, self-assured, and self-confident. Jesus says that if you want to be happy and blessed realize you are needy. That is, humble yourself and admit you need God. Matt 5:3 in the NLT makes it clearer - “God blesses those who realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is given to them.” Oh how happy and blessed are those who realize they were never meant to be independent of God. And so if you want to be happy admit your need and humbly ask Jesus to take over your life. Why? Our text has the answer:

1. God tells us through Hosea to (v8a) "...stay away from idols! Stay away from the things the world idolizes as the means of happiness and fulfillment. Why? Because these things deceive, fail and could ruin you. (v9) “Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those who are discerning listen carefully. The paths of the LORD are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in them. But sinners stumble and fall along the way.” Your idols do not care about you, the Lord is saying, but...
2. “I am the one who looks after you and cares for you. I am like a tree that is always green, giving my fruit to you all through the year.”
 - a. “I am the one who looks after you and cares for you.” It is God who looks after you and cares for you...like nothing and no one else can. He created you and sent Jesus to die for you (to pay the price and penalty of your sin.) so that you could know God forever, so you could be in His presence continually; So that God, the Holy Spirit could live in you. God wants to look after you and care for you. But you must admit your need of Him. You are in error if you think you are self-sufficient. No, it is in Christ that all things are possible, not in yourself. Your confidence must be in Him,

not yourself. Don't be anxious, pray! Don't worry, put God first and He will meet all your needs. Don't fear, God is on your side and if God is for us who can be against us? Don't be down, seek God and do what is right and you will be lifted up. Don't let your pride get in the way of admitting you are poor in Spirit. "God blesses those who realize their need for Him." Why do you insist on being self-reliant and having it your way? God is much more powerful, wiser, and loving than you are! He says,

- b. "I am like a tree that is always green, giving my fruit to you all through the year." Imagine a tree that is always green. It is always fresh and new. It never dies. It always has life in it. Its leaves provide shelter and safety from the sun, the storm and the rain. And it has fruit to sustain you. And it has fruit in all seasons. God looks after you, cares for you and gives you all temporal and spiritual blessings. He is all-powerful, all knowing and all loving. He is always present, to protect you, provide for you. He gives you strength as you abide in Him. He gives fruit as you abide in Him; fruit of righteousness, grace, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

You want to be happy. What will make you happy? I know. You would be happy if things were perfect. No worry, no fear, no hurt, no pain, no grief, no sorrow, no troubles, no bad relationships, no wrong decisions, no mistakes, no regrets, no negative emotions, no unmet need, no unhappiness. We want a perfect life in a perfect place. Then we would be happy and blessed. Do you think you can create such a life and place in this world with your own power so you can be happy? No, but listen again to what Jesus is teaching:

"Blessed (or, "oh how happy) are the poor in spirit (those who realize their need for God), ... (why? Why will you be happy when you realize and accept your need for God?)... *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

Imagine filling out a resume for a job and writing: "I am not self-confident, self-assured, self-dependent or self-sufficient, but boy, am I happy." I'm not sure that would get you the job. And it may not help even if you added: "I am happy and blessed because my faith is in God. I realize that in Him I am confidence, assured, dependent and sufficient. He looks after me and cares for me. He is all I need." No, I'm not sure a resume like that would get you many jobs. But I do know that if you stay away from the things the world idolizes, realize you need God and put our faith in Jesus He will bless you now and in the world to come. He looks over, cares and sustains those who put their faith and depend on Him. They know this life will never be perfect but they are blessed with this hope: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven."