



Terrible or not, difficult or not, the only thing that is beautiful,
noble, religious and mystical is to be happy.

Arnaud Desjardin

'Happiness According to Jesus'

In the 42nd chapter ('Christianity: Happy Are They Who . . .') of her book, 'Happiness,' Joan Chittister, wrote about happiness from her Christian perspective. She wrote:

The life of Jesus stands before us much the same as that of many another great figure of history or religion. This was a soul free from the common undercurrents of humanity. He strode through his world above and beyond its pettiness, its small ambitions, its puny desires. He roused people to new levels of thought. He healed them and befriended them. He refused to allow anyone or anything to ghettoize him or cut him off from those "who were not like us."

In a Roman colony where resentment seethed toward the foreign oppressor, he cured the children of Roman soldiers.

In a colony still playing at internal jealousies and historical prejudices and present shunning, he went to the forbidden land of Samaria and taught a woman there the fine points of his theology of life.

In a culture in which sickness was still seen as punishment for sin, he cured one after another after another of the people by saying, "Take up your mat and walk," rather than simply "Your sins are forgiven you."

In a culture in which religious figures themselves had become rigid or legalistic, he who was not a rabbi confronted scribes, Pharisees, and rabbis at every turn about their own sins against the people.

In a society where women were excluded from public thought and participation, women followed him in droves and he did not turn them away.

This commitment to unmask rejection, corruption, and prejudice was the hallmark of his public life until, eventually, both religious figures and officials of the state made him both enemy and outcast. Finally, in collusion with one another for the sake of their own ambitions or control, they managed to get him executed.

It is a story far too common in the life of many powerfully good, powerfully prophetic figures.

And yet Jesus' teachings, in the midst of all the sorrow and pressure around him were about happiness.

In what history has come to call his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus preached the key to living a happy life to people who, most would say, had little or no life at all. Even you, he said---as Christianity would say later to all the enslaved and oppressed of Europe and eventually the world---even you can be happy. The problem was that it turned the whole notion of success, power, and happiness upside down. The scripture reads:

Blessed (happy) are the poor in spirit: the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Happiness, Jesus says, does not lie in grasping for the goods of this world. Nothing satisfies anyone indefinitely, so to put our happiness in the accumulation of things only serves to set up the hedonic treadmill on which we run from one thing to another and doom ourselves to be forever disillusioned.

Blessed (happy) are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance. Every attempt to wrench the world to our own taste and designs can only end in frustration and resistance. To live well on the earth we must live in harmony with everything else here.

Blessed (happy) are those who mourn: they shall be comforted. It is those who care for the suffering of the world, who take on themselves the grief of those who are deprived, whose meaning in life is outside themselves, who know what real happiness is all about.

Blessed (happy) are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness: they shall have their fill. Those who seek justice for others, who spend their lives building a just world, live a life full of meaning and purpose, the acme of real happiness.

Blessed (happy) are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them. Those who understand what it is to be a human being, who value human growth more than the imposition of human laws on those most unable to keep them, will themselves live a life free of the pain of perfectionism.

Blessed (happy) are the pure in heart: they shall see God. Those who harbor no dishonesty, who seek no harm to others, who live without evil in their hearts make all the world safe and all people welcome in the human community.

Blessed (happy) are the peacemakers: they shall be recognized as children of God. It is those who refuse to stir up hatred between people or seek to operate by force rather than love who bring the spirit of the love of God into the world.

Blessed (happy) are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness: the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Happiness transcends feeling. If we live as we ought and do what we must to make the world a caring place for everyone, whatever the pain or price or social cost of doing it, the soul will be in peace.

Blessed (happy) are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account. The things in life that make suffering worthwhile and pain bearable are whatever it takes to live like Jesus, even in the midst of rejection.

*“Rejoice and be glad,” he says,
“for your reward will be great in heaven.”*

It is a simple formula for happiness. It requires us to live with openhandedness toward the rest of the world. To oppress no one. To harm no one. To care for those who suffer. To minister to those in need. To be gentle with the world. To make peace. To stand for justice and right. To bear persecution from those who reject these things in us without becoming what we ourselves abjure.

Most of all, it reminds us that the fullness of happiness can never be found in the things of this world. Happiness requires more than the senses, more than pleasure. It requires that, though loving these things, we transcend them to become bigger than ourselves for the sake of the rest of the world. It requires a life full of meaning, full of purpose, full of a reason to be alive that transcends life itself.'

Prayer. Thank you Jesus, for teaching us about heavenly happiness as it blesses us here on earth. Amen.