

Health and Happiness

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[0 : 00] Now this is our communion Sunday but it's also the middle Sunday of our 14 days of prayer which if you weren't here last week and didn't get feel free to take a laminated card and participate in it for the remainder of this week.

But we're encouraged for today on our 14 days of prayer to pray from Philippians chapter 4 verses 6 and 7 and 8. Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

So we're going to pray together and pray on the basis of this verse and ask God's blessing on our worship today. Let us bow our heads in prayer. Lord God we thank you today for this opportunity to come together in worship and in praise and to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. And we thank you for those today who are visiting with us. We pray your blessing on them and we ask and pray that they would know the encouragement they are to us and that they themselves would be encouraged from being with us.

We ask and pray that we would recognize how great you are Lord God and how glorious and how wonderful and how sovereign and how perfect and how holy and how pure.

[1 : 38] And yet that today we would know more than anything your wonderful active love on our behalf in the person of your Son Jesus in providing for our salvation and for our healing and for our happiness and for our health.

Lord God we ask and pray that you would help us to not be anxious today. We come before you as people with all kinds of anxieties and worries and fears and doubts and troubles and with heavy hearts sometimes, with broken hearts at other times.

And we pray and ask that whatever is our experience today and whatever week we have come from that we would be able to present our requests before you as our God and our King.

That we would cry out to you and that we would know your peace which passes all understanding that it would be inexplicably great and that it would be our experience today even as we worship on this day.

Lord we pray for the work of the congregation and for our outreach and the various efforts that we are engaged in formally and informally to share the Gospel with our friends and our neighbours and our families.

[3 : 05] And we pray that you would continue to bless that work. We pray for the work of our Christian unions and the universities which is highlighted today in our prayer sheet and we remember them.

We remember all our young people as they go through times of exams just now and maybe concerns about the future and concerns about your own purposes for them and for what is the next step in their lives.

We pray that they would not be anxious at times like this but they would commit to you and know your peace and your help. Lord God we ask and pray that you would continue to bless us in our time of worship and in our fellowship and in the sacrament today where we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Now I am going to read today from Luke's Gospel. We are going to continue our reading, our study in Luke's Gospel today and indeed tonight as well. There is a crescent for children of Cresced Age if they so desire and for their parents.

To take them if they so desire. But there is no Sunday school today. So I am going to break up the sermon again like I did a couple of weeks ago partly because of the children. It is easier maybe to understand it in little bits and also because it fits in well again with our study.

[4 : 39] So we are going to look first of all at Luke's Gospel, chapter 6 which is the next section. James looked last Sunday morning at chapter 6 verses 1 to 17 and we are going to look this morning and this evening at the rest of this chapter today.

We are going to begin by looking at verse 17 to verse 19 where we are told about Jesus that He went down with Him and stood on a level place and a large crowd of His disciples was there and a great number of people from all Judea, from Jerusalem and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases.

Those troubled by evil spirits were cured and the people all tried to touch Him because power was coming from Him and healing them all.

Amen. I am going to talk about this for a few moments this morning and look at some of the other bits later on and also this evening. And from verse 17 to the end of the chapter here we have a kind of condensed version of the Sermon on the Mount.

It is shorter than Matthew's Gospel account of the Sermon on the Mount but nonetheless the main teachings of the Sermon are here and it is difficult to do justice to it in such a short time.

[6 : 09] But we have here Jesus in many ways certainly in the first section here speaking about the way to health and happiness and we are going to look at that through our morning service.

And also as God and as the giver of truth is the one who is speaking about the consequences of rejecting His exclusive salvation and His exclusive offering to health and happiness.

And this first section is speaking about the healing power of Jesus Christ. We know that from the gospels. The gospels speak a lot about the healing power of Jesus Christ.

And verses 17 to 19 give us an account of many people coming to Jesus to be healed because He had the power to heal them.

And that reality was very much part of the gospel reality. Is that when Jesus healed people He was healing them because it gave authority to His message.

[7 : 18] It gave authority to what He was saying and because it was speaking of what He had come to do not just to heal people physically but more significantly and more importantly to heal them spiritually.

And His power which was evident in the physical healing of these people was suggestive and pointed towards His power which alone can spiritually heal us.

And that is the power of Jesus Christ in our lives today and one that we celebrate and remember at the Lord's Supper is that we recognize, each of us have recognized that we are sick spiritually and we're sick spiritually separated from God.

Needing His healing, needing His health and needing His power in our lives to sustain us and to give us spiritual life and relationship with Him.

And that spiritual healing which we enjoy when we have come to Jesus Christ will one day be dovetailed with a physical healing which Jesus does here for these people and will one day be ours forever with a physically healed redeemed bought back everlasting body and soul together with Jesus Christ.

[8 : 52] And it's important for us to remember at a time like this the deep seated healing of Jesus Christ that He doesn't want it just to be a surface ritualistic healing where you know, oh Jesus died on the cross for my sins and I've been healed but that we allow Him on an ongoing basis His light to shine into our hearts to continue that healing, to continue that cleansing, to allow His light to expose our darkness and deal with it and clean it.

There are very often for us deep seated scars in our lives, harsh and difficult memories, oppressive realities of past experience.

There's many issues, deep seated sins that we cling on to and hold on to that we can very often think that Jesus has no place in dealing with and yet in our lives we are to know the ongoing healing of Christ to deal with our past, to deal with our present and to deal with our future and that influence of spiritual health is one that will be noticed and seen by people.

We know that wherever Jesus worked many crowds came because they heard of what He could do and also they experienced the testimony of those who had been healed.

The word on the street was that people had been healed and we want to see what Jesus is doing.

Now for us, our own hearts, our own spiritual cleansing and healing should radically be transforming our lives and should speak loudly of the Christ that we celebrate and worship and remember today.

[11:01] It is a transformation that speaks to a world that needs healing, a lonely and a broken and a defeated world and the people that we know should see in our lives the healing power of Christ in an ongoing way that enables us to be healthy and to look healthy.

You know what it is like for someone who has not been well and who looks ill and who has maybe been in hospital and after a period of recuperation and being made well, they look well and people say, you look really well, you look better, it is great to see.

That is encouraging and spiritually there is a sense in which that is the case in our lives too. A transformation in our hearts that Jesus makes a health, a wholeness that is evidence.

And for us today, we remember that anything else in terms of healing is temporary and trivial in the light of eternity.

Of course we are all concerned for our physical healing and our ongoing physical health. But if that is all that we are concerned about, if that is our concern at the expense of our spiritual health, then we are missing the point of living, we are missing the point of life.

[12:28] At best we are aging and dying and it is not getting to the root of our sickness simply to crave physical health in our lives.

We are papering over the cracks and a society that is obsessed with our bodies and with our physical health while important is losing sight of the spiritual health that Jesus brings and the light of Christ brings and the power of Christ brings into our lives.

So as we sit at the Lord's table today, we remember His healing. We remember that we have been healed from our spiritual sickness and we thank God for that in our lives.

Now we are going to sing again together in Psalm 1, Psalm 1 and the tune of St. Petersburg. And it is on the screens behind you.

And it speaks about blessing, contentment, happiness in following God. It also gives the opposite of that and that is the next section of the sermon that we are looking at this morning.

[13:40] How blessed the one who does not walk or wicked men would guide his feet, who does not stand and sinners father sit upon the scorners seat. The law of God is his delight, his meditation day and night.

Psalm 1, the tune of St. Petersburg will stand. We are like us now to look at verse 20 and 21 and 22 and 23 on page 103, 4.

Looking at his disciples, he said, blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who hunger now for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil.

Because of the Son of Man, rejoice in that day and leap for joy because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

[14:42] The happiness from Jesus Christ. We have looked at the healing power of Christ and we are looking at happiness, a happiness that comes from Jesus Christ in the shortened version of the Beatitudes.

I am going to make three remarkable statements, reminding us of the radical nature of faith. The first is, as Christians we are happy.

We are happy, we are blessed. Deep-seated happiness is ours as Christians. That is a kind of radical thing to say because lots of people think Christians are miserable and unhappy and kill joys and the worst of all people.

But Christians by their redeemed nature are blessed, are happy. That is what blessed means. It means a deep-seated happiness in relationship with God.

It is at the very root of the gift of grace is that we are happy people. God wants us to be happy, isn't that a great thing?

[15:49] God wants us to be blessed by Him. He offers that through salvation and through grace. We praise Him today for that great fact.

What is it if we ask anyone today in the streets, that makes up this kind of formula of happiness? I am sure that these things would at least belong, would be part of it.

A sense of belonging, a sense of being part of something important. Satisfaction, getting a sense of satisfaction out of life and what we are.

And laughter. Joy, celebration, rejoicing, parties. People would say all of these things go on to make up happiness.

Also it is Christ, but with a different emphasis. We are happy. Why? Because we are belonging, blessed are you, for yours is the kingdom of God.

[16:45] We belong to Jesus Christ. We are part of the kingdom of God. We have a fantastic heritage. We have a dynasty to which we belong, to we have a home.

That is tremendously significant when so many people lose and have no sense of identity. And are wondering about looking for a sense of where they belong and to whom they belong.

We will sit at the Lord's table and we recognise that Christ is the host. He is the host of that table and we belong to His family in it, for Shadows sitting at His kingdom, feast in glory.

It is an everlasting home that we belong to. It is an everlasting father that has taken us up into His arms. We are part of God and of His future. So we have belonging. So there is a happiness and a deep-seated happiness because of belonging.

There is also satisfaction. Blessed are you, hunger now for you will be satisfied. That means in Christ that our lives and our gifts and our jobs and our relationships have meaning in Christ.

[18:04] And we can find satisfaction in them through Christ. We are not striving after a personal satisfaction that we can't understand where it will come from.

There is nothing random that is happening in our lives. We don't have the burden of holding our own destiny in our hands and relying simply on what we make of life to carry on.

We have the greatness of knowing that Christ has dignified our life and dignified all that we are with meaning. And we are satisfied in being in relationship with Him, satisfied to worship, satisfied to know that even the most menial tasks in our life can have purpose and glory.

Because we do them in the name of Jesus Christ, in His power. We know that even when difficult and tragic and sad things happen to us, that it is not meaningless and it is not random, but that we can rest in Him and find satisfaction that there is a purpose beyond what we can even work out. So there is belonging and there is satisfaction when we come to Christ and when we are fed by Christ and when we know Christ better. There is also laughter.

[19:28] Blessed are those who weep now for you will laugh. We often do associate laughter maybe with godliness or with holiness. And that is a shame because laughter is God's gift and it is a response of blessing, of knowing that we are blessed.

In His shadow we have many reasons to be joyful and to laugh. When we are healed and when we know His healing there is a lightness in our spirit that enables us to rejoice.

When we are safe we are able to rejoice and laugh with a pure sweet laughter that He had created us for.

When we are safe in Him knowing that we are healed and there is a sense in which as Christians we can genuinely say, look, lighten up.

Stop thinking the world rests on your shoulder. Stop taking that place of God and thinking that everything relies on you and it is all up to you and to me. There is a sense in which we can lighten up because the weight is off our shoulders because we are Christ's.

[20:47] Most in this life, genuinely and deeply, well parents here will know, children. Children laugh most and you can think back, probably you laughed most when you were a child.

And why is part of the reason for that? Because we are carefree as kids. Because the weight of the world is not on our shoulders. Because we are not sitting in exams and we are not trying to impress our boss and we are not looking for our next career move and we have not been offended by lots of people.

If we are offended then we just cry for a moment and just run into mum or dad's arms for a hug. And soon we can laugh again because there is that sense of lightness in the child because of where there is safety and belonging and security is.

And Jesus said unless we enter the kingdom like little children, we will never enter. And we have to retain that aspect of childlike faith which enables us to know belonging and know the satisfaction that triggers a joyous praise and celebration and laughter in our lives.

We are happy. That is statement number one. But the paradoxical statement that goes with it is that it comes through sadness.

[22:07] We are blessed. We are happy. But our happiness comes through sadness. What a paradoxical statement that is from God's word. And He says, blessed are you who are poor.

Blessed are you who are hungry. Blessed are you who weep. Blessed are you when men hate you and insult you. So we have a paradoxical set of statements here where our happiness comes

through sadness.

Counter cultural message where the happiness of the world comes in all kinds of different ways but not from God and not through God.

But the happiness, the blessedness we receive comes through sadness when we recognize a spiritual poverty that needs to be addressed.

A hunger that is looking to be satisfied. A weeping when we consider ourselves before God and a realization that in being Christian we are going against the tide and will endure the hatred very often of a world that has no time for Jesus Christ and for His truth.

[23 : 30] And through sadness we come to Christ because we have recognized we have nothing to offer to Christ. Poverty of spirit and the indescribable poverty of our soul drives us to the one who has indescribable riches and who offers us salvation freely and fully.

But we don't argue with Him, we don't gamble with Him, we don't barter with Him and say, look I'll give you so much, look at what I've got to give you.

We recognize we are spiritually poverty stricken. The way of nothing to offer Him and that causes us to recognize and experience sadness and repentance and tears for what we haven't got for our great ugliness spiritually before a pure and holy and good and perfect and loving God.

When we see ourselves in comparison to Him we see the duplicity of our hearts and the greed and the selfishness and the pride and it causes us to weep to be sorry that we have turned against Him so much and chosen a way that is so destructive and so unhealthy for us.

And at the same time in an ongoing way we hunger, there is a sense of need within us to know more about Christ and that will often drive us to the place of tears and sorrow as we are looking for Him and hungering after Him and looking for His satisfaction which undoubtedly comes.

[25 : 29] And you know at the same time in coming to Christ there is that coming of blessedness but through sadness because we know our life has changed in the world in which we live and we will face a sense of exclusion, insult and rejection if we are living for Christ and that undoubtedly brings sadness. It can bring sadness into our family, into our relationships because maybe people don't understand or they don't like the exclusivity of the offer of Jesus Christ or they reject on the basis of hearsay or on their own impressions of what Christianity is and so it does bring that sense in which we are rejected because Christ's way is so counter cultural so we are happy but it comes through sadness but always via the cross of Jesus.

And that must be what we remember today, that joy which comes through sadness is via the cross of Jesus, the cross is central to us and what we are and we are here to remember that today.

It's our paradigm, it's our prism through which we see everything and look at life, most importantly it's the prism in which we look at ourselves, we compare ourselves to the Christ who gave Himself on the cross for our sins.

It's the only place in understanding ourselves that we can be sad at what we are and what we caused Jesus to experience. But at the same time as we go there we recognise that on the cross Christ and this is why the sadness and the happiness must come through that avenue of the cross and it must be the fulcrum and the centre point of it, it must be the prism through which it all comes because it is on the cross and it's through the cross and by the cross it Christ absorbs that sin and that sadness and that pain and that hurt and that brokenness and that rejection in suffering in our place, in dying on our behalf, we see Him, however we can visualise that we acknowledge He absorbs that and takes it in our place and as we put our trust in Him on a day to day basis He radiates to us the life that allows us to be happy and to be at peace.

You know we prayed about that at the beginning from Philippians that with all our anxiety He takes that anxiety and He takes all the root causes of that anxiety whether it's self worth or whether it's pride or whether it's hurt from our upbringing or whether it's rejection at work or whether it's our lack of perceived gifts or whatever it is that causes us anxiety and pain and He takes that and He absorbs it in His own wonderful salvation on the cross allowing us the lightness of Spirit, the freedom to enjoy Him and to be blessed and to be content and to be rich with an unparalleled richness and to laugh so that today for us as in every day and as in the great isn't it great that the Gospel and looking through Luke reminds us of that, that the cross of Jesus Christ and the achievement of Christ on the cross remains at the heart of our understanding, the only place where we truly understand ourselves and also the only place where we truly understand God.

[29 : 45] It's the one place where sadness and where hopelessness and despair can be genuinely redeemed and walked back and where our lives can find purpose and healing and love and

acceptance in Him.

So I want us to remember that today as we sit at the Lord's table, remember the health and the happiness that many people are striving after and looking for going down dead end streets and recognising as you'll see just after we sit at the table for a moment the exclusivity of Christ's way and His warnings of choosing to reject that pathway to health and happiness, not in a dictatorial or in a frightening controlling way but because He is truth and His truth, the truth must out and it must be spoken of. Amen.

We're going to sing together from Psalm 16 and if there are any that are not sitting at the marked pews, we marked out as our table sitting together, then please come forward during the singing of this Psalm and that will be great if you can do so and then we...

I remind us all today that this is the Lord's table, it's not a free church table, it is for everyone who knows and loves the Lord Jesus Christ and belongs to a Christian church that also makes that profession and we welcome visitors to our table today and the congregation and also Ewan McGilvery who has joined us at this... traditionally we kind of have people joining the church around time of communion, it doesn't need to be that way but it's a good time to welcome someone into the membership of the congregation and we welcome you into the membership of our congregation today.

We are given our directive for celebrating the Lord's Supper together in 1 Corinthians 11 and in verse 23, for I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you, the Lord Jesus Christ on the night he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.

[32 : 54] In the same way after supper he took the cup saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me, for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord, a man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup and so on.

Let us bow our heads in prayer, let us pray. Lord God we give thanks today for this opportunity of celebration and of solemn and joyful assembly.

We thank you that we are able to participate in that, not only in the physical way of participating in eating and drinking in a symbolic way, but also participating spiritually in prepared hearts in hungry spirits longing and listening and looking for the word of God to meet us at the point of our need. In fellowship and in loving unity we thank you for all these things and we thank you for the privilege of being able to participate in such a way today.

[34 : 18] Thank you for everyone who is here and we pray for your blessing on us. We ask that these times would be good and significant and high times for us spiritually, that we would sense and know your presence and that your presence would be healing in our hearts and in our lives.

May we come to you for healing, may we not live in the shallows of Christian experience where we never know your deep seated love and light, reaching into the recesses of the dark corners of our hearts because we have no go areas.

May we not be like that, may we not be defensive and possessive of our sinful desires, but may we allow your light to shine and may we know healing and may we know joy and laughter and a genuine lightness of spirit, not in a frivolous way but in a right way because of the weight of the glory of God, who is our master and Lord, so that we can relieve our burdens before Him so that we can know our anxieties being taken and the peace of God which passes all understanding.

Lord bless today the bread and the wine which we will use. We thank you for it and we pray that there would be a tangible sense of unity as we participate and share and pass the cup from each other to each other.

Lord hear us, forgive our sins, cleanse us from all that separates us from you and may we have examined our hearts before we have come to the table and we see the centrality of Jesus yet for us and in our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.

[36 : 22] The night that Jesus was betrayed he took bread and when he had done so, and given thanks as we have done, he took it and said, take it, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same manner after supper he took the cup saying this is a new cup, new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you do proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

I just want to read the second half of what Jesus says and it's a second half we can't leave out. I may feel it's inappropriate at this point on the table but I don't think so. There's always the blessing of Christ but there's also the warnings that Christ brings.

Verse 24, And we must see it in the kind of direct opposite to what he's already been saying about the way of blessing and he's reminding us how important it is to understand the transience of seeking happiness without him, which is really what this passage, second section of the passage is all about.

[38 : 21] You know if we pursue wealth and riches without any reference to him as if that is the be all and end all of living, then he says, you will enjoy it for a while, even maybe as long as you have it.

He says, you've received your comfort, you get in the here and now everything that riches has for you, anything it can give you, you have it here and now.

There's no future aspect to it spiritually or in heaven. You can't take it with you and he says it's folly to live for that without him.

As is in material satisfaction, symbolised by being well fed now, if that's all that our life is, if we're living for the present and for personal satisfaction now without reference to him, it is temporary at its very best.

And if we're living for the pursuit of pleasure and parties, as if that's what life is all about, he says, you will, you will laugh, you'll have great times, but the great times will end.

[39 : 40] It is a short, it's short termism at the very best. We can't put off a day of reckoning where there will be, whereas weeping.

Because it's transient as spiritual beings living without reference to our God and to salvation.

Because he goes on to speak words of woe, the terror of rejecting him, because he is the truth and because he knows, you know.

That's why he says what he says, because he knows and because he loves and because he warns that the pursuit of these things without reference to him is empty and is going nowhere and will achieve nothing for us ultimately in this life or much more solemnly in the life to come.

I was standing outside a petrol station and someone was filling their car and they decided to light up a cigarette there. It was a crazy thing to do and I would do all in my power to warn them, stop that out, well don't stop out, just don't light it in the first place, because you could blow yourself up.

[40 : 59] You would do that wouldn't you, if you had knowledge of the results of what that person is doing, you would warn them if you knew that these results were bad. Oh here's Jesus Christ and He is God and He is truth and He takes this opportunity because He is truth and because He knows the end from the beginning to warn people who think that the pursuit of wealth and happiness and material blessing and celebration without Him.

He warns them that there is no future in it because He is God and because He knows exclusively the answer.

And so not only do we understand that but we rejoice as Christians. Rejoice He says in verse 23, in that day and leap for joy because great is your reward in heaven.

This is a future aspect to the Lord's table where we are looking forward until He comes, until heaven, until the end of this world and this life.

We rejoice today because our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. Great cause for rejoicing and as we rise from here and go into our own lives then I want you to take into consideration Jesus' teaching about how we live, loving our enemies.

[42 : 21] I'm not going to read that section from 27 to 36. I'm not going to speak on it. It's absolutely self-explanatory. Because of the love of Jesus we act differently towards those who are opposed to us and those who maybe are considered as being enemies of Christ or enemies of the cross.

We live love. We walk love and we share love with them. We do good, we bless and we give. And not just to those who love us because that's easy, peasy. Lemon's easy.

It's to those who oppose us and who reject us and who don't hold to what we hold. They will be persuaded by grace through our prayers and through our loving behaviour towards them.

That's by our heads in prayer. Lord God we ask and pray that you would bless this sacrament to us. Bless the element of remembrance as we look back to what you have done, finished, completed, achieved on our behalf.

We thank you for its present element where we share together the broken bread and the poured out wine. Individually but yet symbolically together at a table.

[43 : 48] We pray that that might be a sign and a symbol of our spiritual unity and of the recognition that we work out our grace together.

That we work out our grace as a family. With God as our Father, with Christ as our elder brother, that we are not islands, that we are not lone rangers, that we go as God's people together and we work out and work through our differences through grace and that we sit together in unity. And the mind is of its future aspect too, till he comes. And that we would then go from here and live our lives in the light of that with a counter cultural blessedness, happiness through sadness via the cross.

Loving our enemies and serving Jesus Christ with all the power that he gives us to do so. The gift of life and the presence of his Holy Spirit in our hearts to help us root out and deal with sin and separation.

Lord, give us a great sense of joy today and blessedness in your presence, for we ask it in his precious name. Amen.