

Text: Isaiah 60:1-6

Theme: Putting More Happy in Our New Year

January 6, 2019

Happy New Year! Well, maybe it is and maybe it isn't, but that's what we say at this time of the year. Yet, as we say the words, we know they're not exactly true, that life could be better, and, in some cases, life needs to be better. As I looked at our readings for this Epiphany Sunday, they each seemed to speak to the new year, to the happy part of our Happy New Year. So, today we take a few minutes to consider how to put more happy in our Happy New Year.

I. It's no surprise that God intends us to enjoy life. A. Yet, some days, it's a struggle. 1. It's a struggle because we're too busy looking down. The Psalmist says, "Lift up your eyes all around and see." At first glance, that sounds like a strange statement. Yet, how often are we looking down, walking around with our head down? How frequently are we navel gazing at all our problems instead of looking up and seeing life in a different way? As our struggles pile up, as we get weary while doing good, and frustrated with different aspects of life, we struggle to find happy in our days because we're too busy looking down where we find nothing useful.

2. It's a struggle to enjoy life because we lack the energy to shine. Marshfield Clinic or maybe it's the hospital that uses the motto, "Don't just live. Shine!" Yet, how often do we find ourselves in getting through another day, another week mode? Getting through the day hoping tomorrow will be better may be how many live, but it's not how we shine. Shining takes effort. It takes energy and when we're struggling in survival mode, there's no energy left for shining. God may want us to enjoy this new year, but, to enjoy, we first need to move out of the rut of just living so that we realize shining is not only possible, but a good thing for God and for us.

B. What steps can we take to put more happy in our new year? 1. We start by choosing to be happy. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, we find the powerful words, "Choose life." How many things in life are a choice? You chose to get out of bed, chose to gather for worship. Whatever events you have planned for the rest of the day are based on choices. When you get right to the heart of the matter, you choose to work where you work. In the beginning, God created people with the ability to choose. Happiness is likewise a choice. You can choose it; I can choose it. Whatever the circumstances, we can put more happy in our new year by making the choice.

2. We put more happy in our year by following the star. Imagine being one of the Wise Men, setting aside all your dreams, all your sometimes insane aspirations as the community elite to follow a star. More happy occurs by moving the focus off ourselves as the star and focusing on the star that leads our hearts even today to the Christ Child. Jesus some thirty years after His birth, said "Come, follow Me." He is the Star of our lives, and as we follow Him, happy becomes happier because life isn't about us. It's all about the real Star of the show who lives in our hearts, forgives our every mistake, and, because we follow Him, brings more happy to our lives.

3. We put more happy in by searching for a closer relationship with our God. King Herod in our Gospel may have had other intentions, but his words ring true, "Go and search diligently for the Child." Whatever your status may be with your God, closer is possible and searching for closer is our life goal. How many of you

have ever spent hours fervently searching for a child or an adult lost in the forest? Even if you've never been there, you can imagine the intensity. In this new year, we search for a closer relationship with our God with that same fervency convinced that the more we search, the more we discover, and the more we will find true happiness.

4. We put more happy in our new year by teaching ourselves to rejoice. "When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy." It's obvious that the translators struggled to find just the right words for this phrase. Why? Because it was a rejoicing that went off the end of the rejoice-o-meter! Rejoice exceedingly - how long has it been since you did that? What event could happen in the next week that would create that kind of intense joy? This is a joy beyond any joy we typically experience. Exceedingly great joy is a joy we teach ourselves, a joy that grows within as we make the effort to put more happy in our new year.

5. We put more happy in by functioning in shine mode. In verse five of our text, Isaiah writes, "Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult." Sounds incredibly amazing, doesn't it, so wonderful that we wish we could feel that way. The great news of the day is that we can! If living is a choice, then shine mode and radiant mode are a choice. Whatever those words conjure up in your mind, you can be all that and more. It happens when we take the glorious news of our Savior and put that kind of joy into our hearts, when we move from a joy based on circumstances to that joy that shines because Christ lives and shines in us.

6. We put more happy in our year by making time to worship. When you gather in this place expecting and anticipating, God delivers. When you come looking, you will always find. It may be a hymn, a portion of the liturgy, something in the message or something that occurs as you gather at His Table. I don't know where it will be, but I know it will be here because God is here and God always delivers. However, unlike Amazon, Target, or Kohls, God doesn't make home deliveries. He waits for us to come to Him. For a happier new year, God says, "I'm ready and waiting, waiting for you to gather in My house to receive all that I have to offer!"

7. We put more happy in by offerings our gifts. "Then, opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts." Why did those Wise Men offer gifts? Was it because that Baby needed them or because it was the only way they knew to express their appreciation and joy? Whether at worship or elsewhere, God is waiting for you to offer your gifts. Sometimes they may arrive in the offering plate, but more often they are offered as gifts of our time and talents. When our gifts are offered as a response to faith and to joy, as a means of saying, "Thank You" to our amazing God, when those gifts are heart-motivated, happier will be what we find in our new year.

8. Happy New Year may be idle words offered as a mere greeting. Yet, as you step into this new year, make it a happier year by consciously and diligently putting more happy in your new year. Amen.