

“AND WHEN GOD IS HAPPY . . .”

[A sermon by the Rev. Dr. George Gray Toole]

Texts: Psalm 34 and Ephesians 1:3-14

St. Andrew’s Christian Community, August 12, 2007

INTRODUCTION:

While the way of expressing it seems to have come to us through the black community, the thought and experience pervades all cultures,

“WHEN MOMMA AIN’T HAPPY,
AIN’T NOBODY HAPPY,
AND WHEN MOMMA’S HAPPY,
EVERYBODY’S HAPPY!”

.....

Here at St. Andrew’s it heads the newspaper ad each week,
and it’s the focus that flavors all that is done.

“LET’S MAKE GOD HAPPY!”

Today, I would like us to consider **three simple and natural questions** that emerge from that:

- 1) **Why** should we aim to make God happy?
- 2) How **could we ever do that?**
- 3) **So what?** In other words,
what influence/benefit does it have on us?

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1. WHY SHOULD WE AIM TO MAKE GOD HAPPY?

I think we can assume that God is not dependent upon us for happiness,
but those of us who are parents and grandparents,
can take great delight in unsolicited happiness
given to us by our children and grandchildren.

The basic answer is: because He deserves it!

We speak so often about **being** blessed by God, or **seeking** God’s blessing.

Gratitude wells up on our hearts
and bursts forth in our desire to bless the one Who has so blessed us.

Does God **need** it? No, but God **delights in it.**

As the Psalmist says,

**“WHAT SHALL I RETURN TO THE LORD
FOR ALL HIS BOUNTY TO ME?”¹**

The Psalms themselves are packed with psalms of thanksgiving.

Those reasons for thanks include (but are in no way limited to):

the very gift of life itself,
for the significant people in our lives,
the ability to learn,
the ability to communicate,
the gift of laughter,
those who help us in times of need,
children,
this world’s beauty,
our ability to be renewed and restored,
healing,
tears,
memory,
a sense of time,

The various senses we have,
being delivered from danger,
peace in the midst of turmoil,
music,
art,
for answered prayer,
for God’s action in our lives,
and for a world of natural order.

ILLUSTRATION

On the Princeton University campus

an inscription in German appears on the arch in Fine Hall.

While most would accurately translate it,²

“GOD IS SUBTLE,

BUT MALICIOUS HE IS NOT,”

when a non-German student asked **Albert Einstein** to translate it,

he had already mastered the slang and idioms of American English.

Therefore he translated it,

“GOD IS SLICK, BUT HE AIN’T MEAN.”²

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¹ Psalm 116:12

² Margaret Miner and Hugh Rawson, eds., *American Heritage Dictionary of American Quotations*, New York: The Penguin Group, c. 1997, p. 213.

Our gratitude to God for these gifts (and many more)
propel us to bless God.

Scripture tells us that this gratitude and blessing
makes God happy!

Our New Testament lesson zeros in on the religious reasons
to bless God
and make God happy.

It begins, significantly, by declaring,

**“BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.”**

He then tells us the reason for blessing God
by making a general, summary statement,

**“(WHO HAS BLESSED US)
WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING.”**

Then he gives examples,

1. We have been chosen in Christ before all time.
2. We have been adopted as God’s own children through Jesus Christ.
3. We have redemption through His blood.
4. We have forgiveness of our trespasses/sins.
5. He has lavished His grace upon us.
6. He has made known to us those things that are mysteries to outsiders.
7. He has made us a part of His great plan.
8. We have obtained an inheritance.
9. We have been marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.
10. You have become God’s own people.

Wow!

What an amazing list!

And you and I know that **my list,**

**your mental list,
and Paul's list in Ephesians**

only **begin** to state the reasons why our urge
to bless God is irrepressible.

ILLUSTRATION

The whole thing may have best been expressed
in an old hymn
that was often used in the past
when the offering was brought forward in a church service.

It goes like this (you may remember it),

“WE GIVE THEE BUT THINE OWN,
WHAT E’ER THE GIFT MAY BE;
ALL THAT WE HAVE IS THINE ALONE,
A TRUST, O LORD, FROM THEE.”

.....

**THERE IS NO DOUBT
THAT BLESSING GOD
BRINGS GOD DELIGHT.**

**THE GOAL AT ST. ANDREW’S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
IS “TO MAKE GOD HAPPY!”
GOD DESERVES IT,
AND IT SHOULD BE,
IN FACT,
THE GOAL OF EVERY AND ALL CHRISTIANS!**

2. HOW SHOULD WE MAKE GOD HAPPY?

First, **by genuine and right worship.**

The Old Testament prophet, Amos,
conveyed to the people God’s disappointment and disapproval
of the manner in which they worshipped Him.

This is God’s message through Amos,

**“I HATE, I DESPISE YOUR FESTIVALS,
AND I TAKE NO DELIGHT IN YOUR SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES.
EVEN THOUGH YOU OFFER ME YOUR BURNT OFFERINGS
AND GRAIN OFFERINGS,
I WILL NOT ACCEPT THEM;**

**AND THE OFFERINGS OF WELL-BEING OF YOUR FATTED
ANIMALS I WILL NOT LOOK UPON.
TAKE AWAY FROM ME THE NOISE OF YOUR SONGS;
I WILL NOT LISTEN TO THE MELODY OF YOUR HARPS.”**

Jesus captures what is intended here when He says,
**“THE TRUE WORSHIPER
WILL WORSHIP THE FATHER IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH.”³**

That means worship must not be
dull,
boring,
totally predictable,
done on “automatic pilot”,
or to impress anyone other than God.

Therefore, it must be
God-centered,
from the heart,
imaginative,
reverent,
engaging all of the people,
joyous,
and lively.

Worship should be something we look forward to
and which we continue to feel and think about
long after the service.

Second, **it is personal devotion to God**

I want so much to [re-institute](#) (where it is no longer present)
the practice of [prayer before meals](#)
and [daily private prayer](#).

Devotion to God is essential for our spiritual health
and it makes God happy!

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Third, **our own spiritual growth.**

Too many of us are [anemic Christians](#),
who rarely seek to understand our Bible,
or seek to learn more the healthy aspects of the Christian faith.

Fourth, **the development and encouragement of Christian fellowship.**

Other Christians are a wonderful resource for our growth in the faith.
Moreover, there is the enjoyment of getting to know one another,
for we are, after all,
sisters and brothers according to Jesus!

Fifth, **essential to the Christian faith is mission.**

ILLUSTRATION

The Rev. Dr. James I. McCord,
who, when he was President of Princeton Theological Seminary,
was fielding questions and answers before a group in California
when a man stood up and declared,
“ALL THE CHURCH SEEMS TO DO
IS TO PUSH ME TO
GIVE, GIVE, GIVE!”

To which Dr. McCord said,
“THAT’S ONE OF THE BEST DEFINITIONS OF THE CHURCH
I’VE EVER HEARD,
AFTER ALL,
THAT WAS THE PATTERN OF JESUS’ LIFE!”

The Church is meant to spend itself in mission,
even mission to those they don’t even know,
and from whom there is no discernable benefit
in the eyes of the world.

ILLUSTRATION

When I was Senior Minister at the Towson Presbyterian Church,
we had a large special education class (as a matter of fact, my wife,
Donna, was a lead teacher).
As the parents of its members became older
I began to become concerned about what would happen to
these men and women when their parents died.
Who would care for them?
Where would they live?

We devised a plan
to donate almost an acre of prime Towson real estate across from the
Church
for the construction of a state-of-the-art home for people with
special needs.
We raised the funds,
drew up the plans,

got the necessary approvals,
and built the facility.

Members of the community were stunned
to discover that we had no role in selecting who would become
residents (they assumed they would all be our people),
even though we had a number of people we hoped would be
admitted. The county would decide that.

Moreover, many of our neighbors were astounded
that we had spent nearly a half million dollars
and would get nothing in return.

Why, some asked,
would anyone give away prime land in central Towson
and pay for a nearly half-million dollar home
without expecting to gain something from it?

As one person said,
“SOMEBODY OVER THERE
DOESN'T HAVE A GOOD BUSINESS HEAD!”

When asked why we did it,
my answer always was.
“IT'S WHAT OUR LORD WOULD HAVE US DO
FOR THESE SPECIAL NEEDS PEOPLE,
AND WE DO GET SOMETHING IN RETURN.
IT IS THE SATISFACTION OF KNOWING
THAT WE HAVE DONE SOMETHING SPECIAL
IN JESUS' NAME.”

.....

One of the hallmarks of this congregation
is the generous and extensive mission in which it is engaged.
You realize that mission
is not an option,
but a mandate for Christian men and women.

Central to all of this is
[Christian mission is help given with a message of hope.](#)
I admire groups and agencies that offer help to those in need.
I've served on the boards of some of these wonderful
groups.

BUT WHERE WE ARE DIFFERENT

is in the fact that we offer the message of hope in Jesus Christ.

We don't do mission just because we "want to help people" . . .

That's not enough.

When asked **why** we do mission,

the answer has to be,

"BECAUSE JESUS TAUGHT US TO CARE
AND GAVE US THE MESSAGE OF NEW LIFE IN HIM."

SO WHAT? WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE IN OUR LIVES?

The answer is a simple and brief one.

We know what it means to anticipate the words of our Lord,

"WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT."

**IT IS THEN THAT WE KNOW THAT
WE HAVE MADE GOD HAPPY!**

**"AND WHEN GOD IS HAPPY,
THEN EVERYBODY IS HAPPY!"**

Amen.

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