

**Sermon – Sunday, January 30, 2005**  
**Title: “Most Likely to Find Happiness”**  
Text: Matthew 5:1-12

I want us to think about high school for a minute. For some of us, it was only yesterday. For others of us, I'll give you an extra minute to make the journey back. Think about the senior year experience and all the anticipation of graduating from high school and setting forth into the real world. We wondered what our lives would be like, where each of us would end up, etc.

One of the traditions for many graduating classes is to vote on the “Most Likeliest”. You know – the “most likeliest”.

- Most Likely to Succeed.
- Most Likely to Be Rich.
- Most Likely to Marry Rich.
- Most Likely to Rule the World.
- Most Likely to Be on World's Dumbest Criminals.

I found some high school graduation pictures of some famous folks that I thought might have made their own high school's “most likely” list.

Tom Hanks – “Most Likely to Be a Hollywood Leading Man.”

Garth Brooks – “Most Likely to Have Friends in Low Places.”

Bruce Springsteen – “Most Likely to Be the Boss”

Obviously I am at a major advantage because I know them now and what they have accomplished.

Today we are going to be looking at the attitudes of people that could be considered “Most Likely to Find Happiness”. Who wouldn't want to garner this distinction. Rarely would you find a high school student who didn't hope that his or her life would be filled with happiness. Our culture is addicted to the pursuit of happiness. The January 17<sup>th</sup> issue of *TIME* magazine was devoted to “The Science of Happiness”. But it is important as we begin our journey this morning that we take a few intentional moments to define happiness.

### Happiness Redefined

In high school when we voted on these things I don't believe we had a real solid grasp on what actually would make a person most likely to succeed or to dominate the world. Our criterion for selecting individuals was most likely pretty ignorant and superficial.

In our culture today, this same approach is taken in our assessment of who is most likely to be happy and who isn't. Shallow and ignorant criterion such as wealth; achievement; fame; marriage – all supposed indicators of happiness. When such things are evident in a person's life, there is an assumption made that happiness will be found.

But Pastor Rick Rushaw reminds us that “probably in no other arena of life do spiritual values and cultural values come more at odds and collide with each other than in the pursuit of happiness.”

But Jesus had a few words to say about this and as usual it is exactly opposite of the message from our culture and this leads to our text this morning.

Yet I expect that some of my readers may be puzzled by how blithely I seem to relate the Beatitudes to happiness. In most English translations, including the KJV, NIV, and NRSV, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” not “Happy are the poor in spirit.” So why, you might wonder, do I seem to equate blessedness with happiness?

I could simply say that people who are blessed are also happy. It's hard to imagine someone saying, “I am so blessed, but I feel miserable.” Yet my reason for seeing happiness in the Beatitudes is more a matter of linguistic precision than anything else. If you were to read these verses from Matthew 5 in Greek, you'd find the word *makarios* behind the English word *blessed*. (People as old as I am might remember a president of Cyprus who was called Archbishop Makarios. The Greek word is the same.) *Makarios* can be translated as “blessed,” but even then the sense would be closer to “happy” or “fortunate” than “blessed by God.”

When the New Testament writers wanted to emphasize the divine character of blessing, they used a different word (eulogetos, related to our English word “eulogy”). So, when modern translations use “blessed” in the Beatitudes, they run the risk of over-spiritualizing the original meaning. Jesus is not saying, “God gives good gifts to the poor in spirit,” though this is surely true. Rather, he is making a rather stunning claim that the poor in spirit are in some sense also happy.

God does intend for his people to experience genuine happiness in this life, even before we taste the richest joy of the life to come.

We would have this list of categories and we would think through our graduating class and play match-maker. Most of the time I think we were matching up folks on

We often think we know what will bring us happiness. I struggle with the need to know it all. Some of you who know me well are “amen-ing” from your seats. Because this is my personality, it also infiltrates my relationship with God. I want to have God all figured out. I want to know when, where, why, how. I think I know as well as God, if not better than God, what will bring me happiness. Rev. Mark Robertson boils it down to two questions in any consideration of God’s bearing on our happiness. Does God want us to be happy? How, according to God, do we find happiness?

Happiness isn’t an either-or. Jesus didn’t intend to give us the message that we will either be a sinner and happy in this life or obedient to God and be happy in eternity. Moreover, Jesus did not say, “Someday the poor in spirit will be blessed . . . Someday those who mourn will be blessed.” Rather, he spoke of their being blessed as a present tense reality, even though in many cases the source of their blessing lies in the future. Curiously, Jesus’s meaning seems to be “Blessed now are those who mourn, for they will in the future be comforted.” There is a present experience correlated with some future benefit. The same could be said about Jesus’s view of happiness. Yes, it lies in the future, when the sad will be comforted, the meek will inherit the earth, the hungry will be filled, and so on.



*“I am happy from the inside out, and from the outside in, I am firmly formed.”*

Psalm 16:9 (the Message)

*“Look at that man, bloated by self-importance – full of himself but soul-empty.*

*But the person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, really alive.”* Habakkuk 2:4 (the Message)

I'm not talking about going around with a big smile and a giddy laugh all the time. Please don't do that. In all likelihood, you will be assaulted by someone who is annoyed by your perkiness.