

“DON’T WORRY, BE HAPPY” (A General Meditation)

Ephesians 2: 4-10

John 3: 14-21

In about 1990, the song “Don’t Worry! Be Happy” by Bobby McFerrin, was on everyone’s lips or so it seemed. It became one of the most requested songs of its time, and even today it is quite popular. In fact, this song was so popular that it became a fad or a slogan. It could be seen on T-Shirts and even greeting cards.

“Don’t Worry! Be Happy!”

What is your reaction to this advice? I just imagine someone saying, “My whole life is in shambles and you tell me, don’t worry, be happy?” “My family life is shattered and you are telling me, don’t worry, be happy?” “I am experiencing bereavement; I have lost my job and cannot make ends meet for my family; my health has deteriorated, and you are telling me, don’t worry, be happy?”

It seems to me that the whole world is always prescribing opiates which so often deceive us into believing that all is well with life and with the world. The truth is that especially at this time in history, and, with so many disturbing events taking place, in the world, we should be weeping for our world. Wait a minute! Don’t you go into a denial or skeptical mode on me now. If Jesus could weep over Jerusalem, how much more should we, when we recognize the mess the world is in. Everyday, the news tells of the thousands of innocent people including children, being blown off the face of the earth by terrorists and senseless war mongers, of tyrannical political leaders and politicians getting rid of those who oppose them, of millions of people who are suffering from starvation because those who have refuse to share, of a situation where a person can leave 12 million dollars to her dog and over eight billion dollars to other dogs while millions of children are starving all over the world. If all these injustices do not give us cause to weep, what else will? Listen to these poignant words from Jesus as he wept over Jerusalem: **O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.** Jesus continually knocks at our hearts door, pleading with us to let him in, but like Jerusalem, we have slammed the door shut and locked it, some of us for good. And that is very sad.

The story of Nicodemus is typical of so many of us. Nicodemus wanted to open his to the Christ but was afraid. He wanted to go and talk with Jesus but was afraid his friends would see him and scoff at him. Is it not a fact that many do not go to church for the same reason? And how about those of us who come to church? Is it not a fact that we are afraid to say amen or alleluia when we are in agreement with a point the preacher makes, or the ministry in song or a solo, because we feel that our fellow Christians will think of us as being strange? There was an old lady who loved soup, but her pastor found her Amen and Praise the Lord during the church service somewhat distracting. One day he took her aside and promised her soup if she would keep quiet in church. She tried her best, but one

Sunday during worship her emotion got the better of her so she got up and shouted, “Soup or no soup pastor, **Glory!**” The Spiritual puts it best in the words: **No body knows the troubles I’ve seen, No body knows but Jesus. No body knows the trouble I’ve seen. Glory, Hallelujah!** Let us get back to our friend Nick. You know! Our friend, brother Nicodemus. He could not withstand the urge to go and see Jesus so he waited until it was night. I imagine that Nicodemus related his problems to Jesus and I am sure that Jesus did not say to Nicodemus, “Nicky, don’t worry, be happy.” Instead, Jesus said to him, **Nicodemus, you must be born again.** Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus meant when he said, “You must be born again, so Jesus explained to him the meaning of spiritual birth and spiritual reality. Jesus concluded by saying: **As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the son of man must be lifted up. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him, should not perish but have everlasting life. God did not send his son in the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.** (John 3:14-17) This passage is probably the most known and the most recited passage in the Bible. Many who recite this passage do not fully understand its meaning and most will not understand until or when the Holy Spirit interprets its meaning to them. Many others, even when their faculties are going and their minds are failing will recall John 3:16 or the 23rd Psalm which brings to them a certain joy deep within, so that with confidence they are contented to let the old wicked world slip by, and the new life with Christ take its place. I must however warn not to wait until or for a death bed experience. You can have this experience, right here and right now. Eternal life must begin right now. Lay your burdens down beneath the cross of Jesus, and God the Almighty will deliver you from the power of sin and from spiritual death.

Why did Jesus use the analogy of the serpent in his discussion with Nicodemus? Jesus was recalling the story in Numbers 21. The children of Israel on their journey through the wilderness became rebellious against God and against Moses their leader. They found fault with Moses. They found fault with God. God sent poisonous snake among the people as a consequence for their rebellion. Sin always brings consequences. The Bible makes it quite plain. **The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.** The people did experience bites from the poisonous snakes. In fact, many of them died. The people cried out to Moses, **We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us.** Notice that Moses did not console the people by saying to them, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” These are not the kinds of words you say to people when they are in the snake pits. Instead, Moses prayed to God on behalf of the people. God instructed Moses to make the likeness of a serpent and place it on a pole in the middle of the camp. All who were able to look up at the serpent were healed and survived. Jesus was saying to Nicodemus that salvation can only come when one is able to look up at and experience God. Yes sisters and brothers, spiritual healing can only come when one is able to look up at the crucified Lamb of God hanging there from the cross at Calvary. Almighty God as it were confronts the souls of every one with outstretched as well as embracing arms. The invitation, **Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,** is just as poignant today as it was then. Today, God comes to us with outstretched arms. What do we do? Turn and walk away from the greatest gift any one has ever offered to us? That

would be a pity. Rejecting God's gift of eternal life and the joy and peace it offers, is bound to bring consequences.

Sisters and brothers, there is no middle ground. You cannot continue to tell yourselves, **don't worry! Be happy.** If you want to get to down town Toronto, You'd better get on the train, on the bus, in your car, ride you bicycle or walk. You cannot just wish your way there and it is going to happen. The same is true of our relationship with Christ. It is full surrender and total commitment. When next you sing the song: **Don't worry! Be happy!**, please be assured that it might be all right if you **ain't got no place to lay your head, 'cause someone came and took your bed, The landlord say your rent is late, he may have to litigate. Ain't got no cash, ain't got no style, Aint got no gal to make you smile, 'cause when you worry your face will frown, and that will bring every body down. Don't worry be happy!** But remember also that there is a much greater meaning to life. In fact, there is a much better life. Once you have experienced this new life which Christ offers, it is then and only then, you will be able to sing with confidence another song:

O happy day that fixed my choice on thee my
Saviour and my God!
Well may this glowing heart rejoice, and tell
raptures all abroad.
Happy day, happy day, when Jesus washed
my sins away.
He taught me how to watch and pray, and
live rejoicing every day
Happy day, happy day, when Jesus washed
my sins away.

May the Almighty God help you through thick or thin, whatever your circumstances, and may your experience with the risen Christ so filled your hearts and lives in such a manner that you may continue to sing this other song for as long as you live. It is then and only then will, **Don't worry, be happy!** Make any sense. **Amen!**