

- I. Let us take a moment to recall the sermon from a few weeks back.
  - A. No this is not a test.
  - B. If you recall from a few weeks back in the sermon titled, “The Anticipation of Worship,” we examined how the prophet Isaiah was lamenting the apostasy, the rejection of God, that had led to the destruction of Judah and the exile of its ruling class in Babylon and Isaiah was anticipating the time when God would return favor to the Judeans and release them from captivity and the occupation of Judea.
  - C. Well, today’s scripture is a celebration of that Day of the Lord that Isaiah was anticipating.  
In 539 B.C.E. Cyrus the Great of Persia, conquered Babylon and released the captives.
  - D. It is this event that results in Isaiah proclaiming:  
*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me and has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;*

*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion-- to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.*

- E. And what is it that God expects of these newly born Judeans who have been given a chance to start anew; what is it that will make God happy? – JUSTICE.
  - F. But, by 515 B.C.E., just a mere 25 years later they had completed the rebuilding of the temple and once again they found it easier to kill and burn animals to make God happy – rather than doing justice.
- II. True worship begins here, right here, where we come to recognize God's worth in our lives, but it **must** continue into the world where we worship God by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God.
- A. As I mentioned a few weeks back, one of the things provided by the destruction of Judah and the temple, and the exile of Judah's ruling classes to Babylon, was the spiritual

foundation for the message that Jesus was to bring 500 years later.

- B. In particular, his message that what made God happy was not the ritual normally associated with worship, especially animal sacrifice, but rather loving one another.
- C. This message was presaged by the prophet Amos when he told Israel,

*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.*

*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.* Amos 5:21-24

- D. As the ancient Christian teachings tell us, sacrifice is no longer necessary, because Jesus was the last sacrifice; the sacrifice that made God eternally happy and satisfied.
  - 1. But doesn't this muddy the waters a bit.
  - 2. Isn't this still buying into the sacrifice theology that you had to kill an animal

in order to make God happy;  
in this case Jesus.

3. Well, actually --- NO!

- E. To understand why this is not buying into the ancient theology of sacrifice that the ancient Jews and the Pagans believed in, we need to recognize that it wasn't Jesus death that satisfied God or made God happy, but rather it was Jesus' life.
- F. First, remember that sacrifice was not simply about killing an animal, but more to the point, about giving a gift to God. A sacrifice was a gift to God to make God happy; it was how the Jews and the Roman Pagans worshipped God.
- G. But in the case of Jesus, it was not his death, but rather his life that was the sacrifice; his life was the gift that made God happy and was truly worship.
- H. As found in the ancient hymn the Apostle Paul records in his letter to the Philippians, what made God happy was Jesus obedience to God, even though such obedience landed him on a cross.

- I. It was Jesus life, Jesus doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God that made God so eternally happy.
  - J. Jesus' life was his worship.
- III. On that note, it tis the season to be merry, and it tis the season of gift giving.
- A. We spend what most of the world's population would see as a fortune every year to give one anther gifts.
  - B. We do it with the hopes of making each other happy.
  - C. But while Christmas is all about gift giving, the gifts we should be most focused on are: first, the gifts from God, including Jesus, and second, our gift to God; that is, our sacrifice to God.
  - D. And so when I ask this question, I hope you all by now will be able to give me the answer.
  - E. What is the sacrifice, the gift, which will make God Happy?
    - 1. Love justice
    - 2. Do kindness
    - 3. Walk humbly with God.

F. In other words, as Sandy told you last week -  
- create harmony.

IV. Now here's some really good news for  
US--

True worship – the kind that does  
justice, loves kindness, and walks  
humbly with God;  
the worship that creates harmony and  
makes God happy;  
well – it also makes us happy.

A. True worship makes us happy because the  
harmony it creates brings joy.

1. Let's be honest, selfishness and being a martyr  
don't really make us happy.
  - a) It's not hard to see that being the martyr  
in a relationship only brings a very  
dysfunctional, distorted, kind of  
satisfaction.
  - b) And if being selfish really brought  
happiness, you wouldn't see so many  
truly sad greedy people who are addicted  
to having more and more, like a drug you  
just can't get enough of.
2. But harmony, harmony that enhances the value  
of all parties concerned, truly does bring joy and  
makes us happy.

3. Living a life that is in harmony and a life that creates harmony is what God is calling us to.

**B. True worship makes us happy because it increases the worth of God in our lives which makes our lives more valuable.**

1. Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God which results in harmony also increases the worth of God in our lives.
2. A day without God, a moment without God, seems unacceptable.
3. The philosopher Nietzsche tells us that, “Happiness is the feeling of power growing.” And he was close.  
But more accurately --  
Happiness is the feeling of our value growing.
4. And to the dismay of Nietzsche who proclaimed God as “dead,” the more we value the source of our being, the more valuable our lives become.

**C. Thirdly, true worship makes us happy because it makes us so grateful.**

1. Study after study has shown that gratitude is the secret ingredient in life of any happy person.
  - a) A truly grateful person who does justice, loves kindness and walks humbly with God will be, as the Apostle Paul said, “Thankful in all things.”

- b) Charles Shelton in his book, "The Gratitude Factor," tells of an email he got that expressed gratitude for some surprising things. It read:  
Be thankful that an alarm clock wakes you because it shows you are alive.  
Be grateful even if the meal you fix fails to turn out as you expect, because it shows you have enough to eat.  
Be grateful even when you ... have higher bills, because it demonstrates you at least possess the means to live comfortably.  
Finally, an example that might prove especially useful to remember around the middle of April:  
"When paying income taxes, don't focus on what you might have to give, but on what you already have."  
It makes sense, since paying taxes demonstrates some or all of the following:  
a job, money in the bank, investments on which to draw on, or some source of income.
- c) "For sure," writes Shelton, "slicing off the gratitude rationale for each statement makes for a distressing thought. Who wants to be stuck with higher bills or more taxes?  
Nonetheless, these statements point out that there is usually a deeper truth to

most of our daily experience than we typically consider." [p.1]

2. True worship, and the harmony it brings our lives, produce in us a real sense of gratitude.
3. As I've mentioned before, I really can't tell you for sure what God is.  
Theology for its best reasoned attempts is speculation;  
revelation for all its profundity, cannot get beyond our imagination;  
so I really can't tell you a lot about God.  
But I can tell God – "THANKS!"
  - a) Thanks for life.
  - b) Thanks for love.
  - c) Thanks for beauty.
  - d) Or, in the words of what may be a Lakota Indian chant.  
Witchi Tai To gim-mie rah  
Whoa ron-nee ka  
Whoa ron-nee ka  
Hey-ney hey-ney no wah  
  
Water spirit feelings  
Springin' round my head  
Makes me feel glad  
That I'm not dead

- V. Yes, true worship brings happiness.  
What is it that you are doing this  
Christmas to do justice, love kindness,  
and walk humbly with God?  
What are doing that creates harmony  
and makes God happy?
- A. Perhaps in this time of adventful  
preparation we should be giving at least as  
much attention to that, as to what to get  
little Johnny and cousin Sue.
- B. Perhaps in this time of Advent we should be  
focusing on what will make God happy.  
AMEN.