"Happy Now?"
Sermon – November 1, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church

A couple is driving through Clinton from the northeast on State Route 12B to go to McDonald's on the southwest side.

The wife says, "Let's go by the back streets and avoid the lights and the traffic. And I heard there's some construction."

The husband says, "No, going through town is the most direct and there are only two lights and you come out right in front of McDonald's. Besides how bad can the construction be?"

After 40 years of marriage the wife knows it's no use arguing and simply says, "Whatever makes you happy."

So, they drive into the village and right in front of our church they get stuck.

Because as some of you might have experienced this week, this is the day there is road construction all along College St. that closes off one lane.

Neither of them says a word. After *10 minutes* the flag person waves them on and they get down to the next intersection. They wait another a minute before being allowed to turn left on Meadow Street and then finally pull into McDonald's just down the road.

The wife finally breaks the silence and says, "You happy now?"

Truth be told, I made up this specific story just to be able to use the title of my sermon. But 50% of married people say they've experienced very similar scenarios many, many times. At least according to a poll I took earlier this morning at my house.

While the tone of saying, "Are you happy now?" might not have been, uh, sincere, today's gospel lesson does deal with being happy. Kind of.

We call Matthew 5:1-12 the Beatitudes and they kick off what we call the Sermon on the Mount, which goes all the way through chapter 7. This one sermon is 13% of Matthew's entire gospel. You would think it would get better press.

"Beatitudes" comes from Latin. In English it would literally be "Blessednesses" or more colloquially, "Blessings".

These come from translation of the Greek word, *makarios* [mah-KAH-ree-os]. As we've discussed in the past, though, it is a challenge to translate *makarios* to have the same meaning in English as it did to those whom Jesus first spoke.

We typically have translated *makarios* as "blessed" as in "Blessed are the poor in spirit," those who mourn, the meek and so on.

On the plus side, "blessed" conveys being a recipient of God's favor and approval. On the con side, it can sound strictly religious and passive.

Looking back the other way, *makarios* is the closest ancient Greek word to our English concept of "happy" or "fortunate". But in our culture, "happy" implies emotional satisfaction, feeling good. But the "hap" in "happy" means luck or chance and based on outward circumstances. Being happy can come and go.

Makarios, though, is an unshakable, self-contained joy rooted in God, not a fleeting good mood.

Another word scholars use in translation is "flourishing". In the ancient Greek world, *makarios* echoed the Hebrew word *ashrey*, found in the Psalms, which literally points to "the good life" or a state of human flourishing. It describes a life that is functional, whole, and thriving under God's kingdom rule, independent of circumstances.

"OK, Scott," you say. "Thanks once again for an etymological discussion of a Greek word as half your sermon, but what's the point?"

I'm glad you asked. The point is, what Jesus is saying by the standards and culture of his day is—how should I put this?—crazy talk.

In the first-century Greco-Roman world, status, wealth, power, and physical honor were viewed as signs of divine favor. The marginalized—the poor, the grieving, the powerless—were seen as cursed or insignificant.

By declaring the "poor in spirit," the "meek," and the "mourning" as blessed/happy/flourishing, the Jesus fundamentally flips Roman values on their head.

Jesus is asserting that those at the bottom of the social hierarchy possess inherent dignity and a primary stake in God's kingdom.

As such, the Beatitudes today are a deeply subversive text in the American context and Christian Nationalism where the word "blessed" has been corrupted by the Prosperity Gospel and has been hijacked by the wealthy, the healthy and the most powerful. Jesus makes it clear that it is not them but the poor, the sick, and the meek that are entitled to the blessings of and flourishing in the new kingdom.

The implication of Jesus blessing the poor, the marginalized, is not that they should be happy in their deprivation, for even though they may be poor materially they surely are rich spiritually!

No. It is more an indictment on society for having forgotten its responsibility toward the neighbor.

It is a warning to God's people. It is a call to accountability, for if God blesses the ones that you curse, there is something fundamentally wrong with your theology.

In the last analysis, Jesus is questioning the way God was being understood by the religious and political leaders of Israel at the time. And the same is true today.

The Beatitudes should be read as Jesus' manifesto for transformation in the community he has just inaugurated in the previous chapter when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

The Beatitudes do not glorify situations of suffering but announce reversal of fortunes for the oppressed. Their blessing lies in being a part of the kingdom of God that exists both in the present and in the future. "Blessed <u>are</u>" means God is at work in the present world and "for they <u>will</u>" indicates God bringing the kingdom to completion.

Those within the present kingdom of God who "are" in difficult circumstances "will be" blessed, happy, flourishing when God brings about the new creation.

The Beatitudes offer a promise of liberation to those at the margins of our society. They also invite and require anyone and everyone with privilege and power to participate in the process of making the promised liberation a reality. In God's world, blessed, happy, and flourishing are those who hunger and thirst and are persecuted for righteousness, who are merciful, who are pure in heart, who are the peacemakers. Those are not passive states, but active ones.

We are not to pity the downtrodden, but to acknowledge them as people of worth, loved by God, and actively work with them to facilitate the reversal of fortunes Jesus has promised them.

Happy now? Yes, and blessed and flourishing, rooted in the character, promises, and presence of God. Now and forever.

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.