

**Westminster Presbyterian Church + 533 S. Walnut St. + Springfield, IL 62704**

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## **Good Apple**

### **Psalm 1**

Last Sunday night we kicked off youth group and the junior high group had quite an assignment. They worked in small groups to create a song based on a Scripture passage. I had chosen some possibilities for them to work with before group began and so one group had the story of the paralytic being dropped through the roof to see Jesus; another had the passage where Jacob steals his brother Esau's blessing; another had a love poem from the prophet Isaiah. Then there was the group that chose Psalm 1, our passage for this morning. I can honestly say you have not fully lived until you've heard junior high youth rapping to Psalm 1. They began by getting into the rhythm, of course, bobbing back and forth while one youth offered the back beat. Then they began: "Do ya wanna be happy?" they asked. "Do ya wanna be happy?" As their rap continued that question hung in the air: "Do ya wanna be happy?"

Well, do you?

The answer is probably yes. Most of us, maybe even all of us, want to be happy. Yet, how many of us are happy? I will not soon forget a conversation that happened with several church members when I was serving in Indianapolis. We were getting ready for a meeting and everyone was chatting as folks arrived. One woman turned to another and said, "I just heard on the radio about this 'Happiness Survey' where they get a sampling of people from all the countries and find out who is the happiest. And, do you know what, we didn't even make the top 100 and Nigeria won!" Her friend turned to her, scowling, and said, "What in the world do they have to be happy about?" We could go on for awhile discussing what they statement means about us as a culture but, one thing it highlights for me is that we don't really know how to be happy. We're certain that we should be happy because of our lifestyles but many of us are not. "Do ya wanna be happy?" We do but we don't know how.

The image offered for us in Psalm 1 tells us that it is simple to find out if we are happy. We are like a tree and our happiness can be seen in the health of our branches, in the amount of fruit that grows from them. What that means is that it is perfectly clear to see, from the outside of you, how happy you are on the inside of you. For those who are happy, they embody this lush tree that has been planted right by a stream. Its branches are weighted down with good fruit and its leaves never shrivel. They contrast the other option which is rootless leftover scraps that have dried up and blow away with any wind. The language used in the original Hebrew harkens us back to Genesis and the Garden of Eden, a perfect place with glorious trees. This tree by the stream is a new creation and it lives as God intended, with all the gifts and privileges of that life, one of the main ones being: it is happy.

Do ya wanna be happy? Really happy? The kind of happy that does not fluctuate based on what is in your closet or your garage? Do you want to be the kind of happy where you live as you were created to live, where your life is a new creation? Do you want to have those strong roots that maintain the tree of your life so that it can withstand any storm? If you want to be that kind of happy then you cannot fill up on empty calories. That may sound odd but not only does this tree in Psalm 1 get constant nourishment from the stream, the Living Water, but the tree also gets food. When the psalmist

sings about meditating on the law day and night he is using a word that also means to chew up, to gnaw on. So he sings: you've got to chew on the scriptures all day long and all night. You've got to eat them up. This trees food is scripture and its drink comes right from the Source. If we want to be happy, the kind of happy that is centered in something real, we cannot fill up on those things that do not sustain. Amazingly we have found the ability to walk around so full: full of food, full of stuff, full of schedules and yet, on the inside, we feel so empty. We are not happy and, from the look of our fruit—from our outsides—it's starting to show. This is the first of 150 psalms in our Bible. It was placed first, before each of them, because it is saying: I know how you can find happiness. You can find it right here, in these songs in these scriptures. If you will chew on them day and night and get fed by God's living water then you will know happiness and this true food will begin to show itself, not only on your insides, but also in your branches and fruit.

Today we celebrate the great gift the Bible is in our lives and we pass that love down to our children by giving our 3<sup>rd</sup> graders their very own book of scripture. This is a wonderful moment and something to treasure. But I have to tell you, those junior high youth who were creating the songs from different scriptures, their assignment had not started there. Their first assignment was that each small group had three pieces of posterboard. On the first I asked each member of the small group to share five favorite songs and a short lyric from each. They feverishly wrote these lyrics on their papers. The room filled with the snippets of sung choruses and giggles. On the second piece of posterboard I asked them to each share a favorite movie and three lines from that movie. Again, the room was buzzing. They shared with the large group what songs and movie lines they'd remembered and most of us were laughing our heads off when one of the youth asked, "What is this third piece of posterboard for?" I replied, "Oh that. Well that posterboard is for you to each share two of your favorite Bible passages." You could have heard a pin drop! Silence. They did not know them.

The children who stood before us this morning have received such a gift. We have all received such a gift but we, every one of us, too seldom open that gift so that it can bless us. In the scriptures we have the chance to get to know who God is and, by knowing that, we get to know more about who we are. In the same moment it can put us back in our place, reminding us we are not the be all-end all, and it can also lift us up to be better than we are. It can awaken our mind and heart to the world and it can heal us from what the world has dealt us. These words, and God speaking through them, can save us from ourselves.

So, you wanna be happy? Truly happy? (holding up a Bible) Then this would be a good place to start.  
Amen.