

Calvary United Methodist Church  
January 26, 2020

## **RECIPE FOR HAPPINESS**

Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

### **Children's Message:**

Jeremiah 17:7

I invite our children to come forward for the children's message. Come on up. It's so nice to have so many of you here. Thank you for sharing your musical gifts with us this morning. It's a wonderful gift to share with us. Good morning, everyone! I love this. We haven't had this many for a long time.

I wanted to talk today about trust. How many of you have someone you trust? Hopefully we trust our parents, our grandparents and the people who are close to us. We learn to trust in a lot of different ways. We trust that if we ask someone to do something, like we ask someone to help you make dinner or supper or breakfast they will help you. We trust that their word is as good as the request, so we ask those things.

As we get older, people trust us with more responsibilities. There will be a time when someone says, "Will you help me maybe bake or cook?" and you'll say, "I can be a little dangerous around all that heat." And yet, your parents would say, "I trust you. You are maturing, you are getting smarter where I trust." And later, in about 16 years they'll say, "Well, you are going to learn to drive now." I know some of you are really panicking now. That goes fast. And they will trust you with the vehicle because they will know you have grown, you understand the dangers, but they trust you because you have proven yourself trustworthy.

We trust God for a lot of things. In our culture here we have a lot. You probably slept in a bed last night and when you turned on water in the morning it was there, right? You didn't have to go somewhere and pump it and carry it, right? And we expect when it is cold out to have a warm coat and we expect our house to be warm. We expect to have food to eat. There are a lot of places in the world where all those things aren't possible and I am actually going to travel to one of them later today. I'm going to a continent called Africa to a country called Sierra Leone and they tell me and teach all the time how to trust God because they don't have big cupboards in most of the homes where I work, filled with a lot of food. And their houses are smaller. They don't all have running water. And sometimes they have to go and find firewood and they have to go and carry water because they trust that somehow God will provide for them every day.

And it is good to learn to trust, but blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. The Prophet Jeremiah says that we can trust our moms and dads and people around us and our homes, but the one that we really trust is God. God is the provider of all good things.

Now, this is sort of a flat map of the world. United States is in the Americas and we are in North America, that big green area on the left of the screen. And the continent I am traveling to is...Sierra Leone is here in the continent of Africa in the red. And I am going over there to the coastal area, way where that little arrow points called Sierra Leone. There are like 56 or 57 countries in Africa. It is a big big place and they are all different. Some places you would think you were right at home, you'll see cities and traffic and all the comforts you have and in some places they don't have all of those things, just like here in America, there are some places where people don't have all the things we have right here in Central PA.

I am going to be flying and after I fly, I will fly about 8.5 hours to Belgium and wait 5 or 6 hours and fly 8.5 hours to Sierra Leone and then I'll get on a boat, a ferryboat with vehicles and people and then after an hour of that we take a drive and it's a long way. And sometimes the roads don't have bridges and so we go on what's called a float and they pull us across with these ferries so we can get on the road because the roads aren't always paved. Sometimes they are pretty dusty.

Have you ever been on a dirty road? Most roads nowadays are paved, aren't they? How many of you remember dusty roads? I kind of thought so. When I was young we went a lot and if you are on a dusty road and you don't have air conditioner and your windows are down, I want you to see what happens. This is Melissa Packer from our church from about five years ago. Her neck usually isn't that dirty. She wiped off her face, but that's the dust from the road.

And what happens when we go and we trust? We meet wonderful people who are so happy because we provide water and sanitation and health care and school books and we give a chance for children who don't have much to try to find a better way of life. Sometimes the children have to use hand-me-downs. I used to do that...I used to get my father's clothes. A lot of you probably don't get hand-me-downs from your parents. And some of the children get very frustrated because they don't have the tools and the electronics. Instead of all the games, they have to work from very young. They have to do things like take their own laundry down to a river or stream. They have to do things like work. They go around selling things like fruits and vegetables and carry water. It's a lot of work when you live in these places. They went for firewood, you need wood to cook, wood to heat the fire, wood to do so many things with. And many of the children because the government doesn't provide school, they don't go to school. They work like adults. Even as little children, they are out selling fish and vegetables and maybe some bark for fire.

And one of the greatest things we do here...how many of you were here in Bible School last year? Do you know where your money went last year from Bible School? It went to drill wells in Sierra Leone. Water is so good. Could you imagine if you didn't have water when you turned on your faucet you couldn't brush your teeth? We use water to wash our dishes. We use water to bathe ourselves. We use water to cook. We use water in so many ways, so we dig wells and we have to have ways to get the water, so a lot of times the children carry

water to wherever they are going. And when you cook, do you have to start a fire in the morning? Many of the places I go, because Sierra Leone has had a lot of problems throughout the year, they cook like this over a fire. Some of the restaurants I eat at have kitchens like this in the back and they cook on charcoal or wood to make things like peanuts and noodles and things that are very common in the diets there.

Some of the jobs where children work because they don't have school, they take hammers and break rocks all day long. Can you imagine doing that? For a year or 5 or 10 or a lifetime? Because they make little stones to put in concrete and build houses and streets because again the country where I am going this time, the streets are not in really good shape.

So, when I say that we are thankful and that we trust God, we trust God because God's the provider of all these wonderful things. We have school. Sometimes I didn't like school, but when a government doesn't provide it, you have to trust that someone will help you with school fees because education is the only way to improve yourself. If you can't read or write you can't do a lot of things. Education is a really wonderful thing.

What we use a lot of things with your gifts and the gifts of this church, we help build schools. We built this medical clinic a few years ago. Not just our church but many churches going together. And we have eye clinics and we are able to dedicate these clinics to help many boys and girls and adults get medical treatment and help.

A couple years ago the women of our church made a lot of little dresses and I gave them out at a school and some of you here probably helped sew some of those dresses. And one year we sent all these brand new school books to schools that didn't have a lot of books. And one day our car broke down and all of these people, there is like 300, waited in a chair for 6 hours to show up. Have you ever waited 6 hours in the sun for anybody? Probably not. We are not good with our patience, are we? And some of the ladies at one of my churches knitted all of these things or crocheted them to give the babies gifts of hats and booties, things that you probably had when you were a baby too. It's a wonderful things.

Next week, probably just about 5 days from now, I'll be visiting Bell Memorial United Methodist Church. That is the sister church that we support at Calvary over in Sierra Leone. And we also support with pastor salary support that helps other preachers be able to work because since the war there has not been much money in this country. Do you know that the average salary for most of the people that we work with there get 10 to 20 cents an hour. That's not much money, is it? In a country that has almost 80% unemployment, it's very difficult to supply. But we are there to make a difference and we are probably of doing that. The people of the churches are so happy because they trust God that people like us will help them.

Yesterday, where's Chelsea...I came in and Chelsea and her father and her mom and about 15 or 20 other people working here with our Easter candy. Our Easter candy is sold...how many of you help by eating food like chocolate? I want to see all these wonderful people

who help by eating chocolate. Well, I want to tell you, we are hurting for helpers over there. Many of our congregation is getting older. When you see that Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays if you have free time, they really need your help. What they were doing is putting stickers on. I told Chelsea yesterday: Do you think this is a small thing, putting stickers on and making candy? But all that money, almost \$20,000 is given not just to here, but to many missions here in Harrisburg in the locality to help people with many projects. You can make a difference by eating chocolate and helping in that process to make a difference. (Child speaks.) That is me in the picture. I try to sit in the back...I look smaller that way. I am going to stick with that.

The last two years we have spent money to buy three tractors because they have these little shovels to break up ground and couldn't plant enough rice and there is never enough food. So we now have almost 1000 acres of ground that has been plowed and we are going to be, I'm taking stuff from the Amish in Lancaster who makes it. I have now three full suitcases of tractor parts and fuel pumps and all kinds of things to help make these machines go. And it makes people very happy to have rice and to have some jobs. It makes them healthier and so on behalf of them, I say thank you. They are teaching us to trust in God because we trust by sharing our gifts, we trust by believing God is trusting us to do the right things all the time.

We trust God that you will have jobs someday and that you will have opportunity to have a home and God is the One who provides. So, I thank you on behalf of those we go to serve because even though you are not physically going with me, you are going with me. You are going with me because you make all of this possible by changing lives. So, I thank God for you and pray you'll always think that I need to trust God because gives me my clothing, my food and my shelter and my parents and my family. So we thank God that we're in position we can help other people.

There are some fruit snacks here. I invite you to take one and thank you for coming up this morning.

### **Psalm Lesson:**

Today I am going to share Psalm 1. When I think of the Psalms I think of a category of readings that covers pretty much all of life. There are many who read the Psalms from week to week. They tell the story of praise and thanksgiving to Almighty God for all the blessings that are ours. They talk about the heartaches of the people who have written them because they have known loss, they have known celebratory times, they have known mistakes, called sins in life. And the Psalms are about as honest as you can get about day to day living and what it means to lean on Almighty God. So listen to the Word from Psalm 1. (Psalm 1 read)

## Message:

I know that when we look to God's Word, we really find, if we are obedient to it, a recipe for happiness in our lives. I mentioned in the first service, I like to cook and cooking can be very forgiving. Whatever it is I've cooked, maybe a little bit more salt, what if I add a little cinnamon or what if I add a little...some other flavoring. You do that with a cake, you're in trouble. If you don't have just the right rising agents, whether it is egg or baking soda or powder or something you are going to have a very flat, tasteless cake from it. The recipe for life is obedience to Almighty God. You can have it any way you want it, but if you want it good, you follow God. He gives us a recipe by telling us there are several ways we can live and all throughout the Bible from the Psalms and from the Gospels and from other readings, we are reminded that there are several pathways from life. The Gospels will tell us there is a broad path and there is also the narrow path.

Broad ways look easy, don't they? Well, you hike into the woods and you see an old logging trail, you know it's broad, it's clear, you know where you are going. The small paths often take you through logs. Sometimes they take you through briars, they are semi-overgrown. But when you get to where you go in that path, according to scripture, you are going to be right where God wants you to be.

The scripture, the Gospels, also tell us that we can be compared to sheep and goats, those who listen and those who don't, those who obey and follow and those who don't. We are given a choice to live a godly life or ungodly, the choice is ours. And so when I look at this every day, I'm thinking how will I live today? Well, I meditate on God's Word and while I follow, it's one thing to know...there are a lot of things my parents told me that I knew were right. I would like to see the honest hands of everyone who always listened to their parents. I kind of thought so. Whether it is driving a couple over the speed limit, be home by a certain time, we know when we follow the rules, especially in most families, when mom is happy, everybody is happy, right?

And so it is with the Kingdom of God, when we look at these verses, they remind us that if we want the good life, follow God's direction in life. The very first verse: Blessed is the one who does not walk in the step with the wicked or take stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers. I always struggle with these first couple of verses because as a young child you are always told, you know, be careful where you go and who you hang out. I want us to never think too highly of ourselves because good can rub off on the bad and bad can rub off on the good. We have to be in control. And who am I to say that I am good? Right? Because I know me well enough to know that some days you don't want to follow me. I try my best, but some days it's probably okay, but I'm a sinner, which means I need to follow God's ways. One of the things we have to be leery for, if we know we have friends who are going down the wrong path, getting in trouble with the law, doing things to harm themselves, etc., we have to understand the more we go down certain paths it is hard to turn around.

I read this wonderful story of a fisherman who was fishing and a bird came and started to speak to him...now I fished a lot in my life and never had a talking bird approach me, but this is a story. The bird wasn't able to find food, the ground was parched and he saw the fisherman had a worm and he said: If you give me a worm, I'll do something for you. The fisherman said: What? He said: I'll give you a feather. The feather looked beautiful and the fisherman said: Why not. And the bird said: Here's my feather. Thank you for the worm. It didn't get any better and day by day the bird got used to getting a free worm and gave him a feather. And finally after weeks went by, the fisherman had a fat bird that was naked for dinner. You see, we can get so cozy doing what is unhealthy and doing what is wrong that it can cost us our very life.

I have had a lot of friends who have tried a lot of things and I have done my own fair share of trying things that I shouldn't have tried and sometimes it is an embarrassment. That's the light side. Sometimes it becomes a lifestyle and we've ruined our body physically, mentally and emotionally, when we've crushed our family members and we've broken relationships, when we are out in the cold, we realize we took the broad road and we sent down the road too far. God's Word is there are a warning to us to not allow our lives to get wrecked. We have all had those little wrecks along life's way. We all have had those and yet God says it can change. Temptation itself isn't a sin, though when you are playing with it long enough it is easy to go down.

My one son-in-law had a very bad issue with alcohol. And he went to prison and he came back forgotten. And I tried to share with him, as much as he liked his friends, they were all very heavy drinkers and the best thing he could do is try to find some other newer relationships to spend time with, because his friends would just say: It's okay, not to drink. They'd say: Well, it's only 1, try 1. And then it's 2 and then it's 3 and then it's 20. And almost every year to this day he is back in jail. He has that pull. I'm not making fight with him because you know I have mine.

My father used to talk to me when I would talk to him about smoking, he'd say: You have an eating addiction. It's just as bad. They all will kill us if we allow things to abuse us and don't take control.

You and I have been told throughout scriptures what it is to be disciplined in our lives, what it is to follow God, but when we get down some paths some things are harder to break from our paths than others and some of it includes relationships, people who are very unhealthy and they take us down paths that lead us away from Almighty God.

The trail that we get on from time to time looks so comfortable and looks so nice, but boy if you get down too far you almost wonder can I go back? I visited with some family of mine in recent weeks. They lost a son a year ago. I buried him at 38, one of 78,000, I think last year to Opioid addictions. Those road that we go down too far sometimes change our bodies and who we are and sometimes there is no return. It's best to try to stay away from some of

those roads.

First Corinthians: Do not be misled. Bad company trumps good character? Come back to your senses as ought to stop sinning for there are some who are eager of God. I say this to your shame.

I started with this comment a moment ago. I want you to know you should love yourself, really, but not too much. Love of self means you keep yourself healthy in mind and body and soul. Love, when you think you are better than anyone else, is really bad love. No one would want to be around someone who thinks they are above other people. We ought to love ourselves and know that you are a gift from Almighty God and you are a blessing from Almighty God, but know that others also are worthy of love.

So, we just need, in order to do self-care, to make sure that we don't go down the long ways. So how do we do that? It says that our delight is in the law of the Lord. On His law we meditate day and night. Have you ever been caught up in something? My mother told me last year she was involved and...now I'm going to forget what it is...Downton Abbey. Probably a few of you were caught up in that. Some people get caught up in certain styles or certain movies or certain books. You start reading and you can't put the book down. You start a movie and you can't go to sleep even though you are tired. There are things we get caught up in. The scripture says: How about getting caught up in God's Word, that you think about it day and night and it becomes a part of who we are, that we become transformed agents of God's love. When it becomes our focus it is a good thing.

When we take photos, we try to focus of what we want whether it is a person or an object and sometimes the thing in the background becomes a blur because there is so much happening. In our lives, there is a lot of blur. We are busy, busy, busy. What ought to be our focus is God and how can God be a part of our life in every way?

When I was reading this I thought of a shepherd named David who became a Psalmist. You know him as King David. He didn't have a copy, leather bound, of King James out among the flocks. He knew the Psalms, in his heart, he wrote them, many of them. Meditate doesn't necessarily mean you are sitting here with your Bible open every day reading. It's your thinking about them in your mind.

Sometimes when I am under a tree in the woods sitting I'll think about the Glory of God. You look up into the sky and see the heavens. You see a sunrise. You see a sunset. We can think of God's goodness. Sometimes when I see someone in need I am reminded of the parables and how God intervened through many people to help the poor and the sick and the lame and the blind, those who could not hear, those who needed hope. When we meditate on God's Word, that means we consider all day long whether you are at work, whether you are with your family or with others, you are meditating and thinking about God's Word. And a part of the thinking is what is it that God has for me? What is the meaning of life for me to-

day? I tried to share multiple times in these past months that you are a gift. Can you say that: I am a gift? (I am a gift.) And God has gloriously made you. I don't know all of your talents and I don't know how the Holy Spirit has blessed you, but there is something that needs done that you have been appointed by God to do and God will use you in a mighty way if you just meditate and say: God, I am available. I am yours. Please use me for your honor and your glory. You need to know God's love so that it can flow out.

When we understand God's love as these Psalmists did, we say: Lord, I'm yours. Fill me that I might outpour your love to others. Psalm 119: My eyes stay open through the watches of the night that I may meditate on your promises. I am sure there are other folks like me who get awake too early and can't go back to sleep. And there are some who try to go to bed and you can't count enough sheep. And instead meditate on God's love and God's Word and say: God, I'm awake. Speak to me. What is it that you would have for me? Because we are so busy rushing here and there with multiple responsibilities at work, at home and social world that God's Word comes to us and we say: Lord, I can hear you with my sense of who I am and that the gifts of who you have created me to be I will find and discover what it is you want from me.

When we say: I rise before God and cry for help, I hope in your word, your word. Amos the Prophet said that it's a straight line, it's a plumb line and we line up our life that we will know if we are truly doing God's will and walking in God's way. The greater than just a plumb line, God's way is light to us, to lighten our path.

I used to hike with my father in the early mornings of fishing season or hunting season, he would go ahead. I'd like to tell you how many times I had a stick whip me in the face. It wasn't that my dad was mean, but he had a flashlight and we didn't have two. A lighted path can take us a long way in the right direction. We need to be setting the path, cutting the trail, for those who are watching us. Our family members, our friends, our neighbors, our coworkers. People are looking for light.

But my delight is in the law of the Lord and on His law he meditates day and night which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither, whatever they do prospers. Don't you want to be fed fully.

Where I grew up there was a tree in the one valley near me called the perfect oak. It was one of those trees that comes up out of the base and all the limbs came from the bottom. Now, our town was a little more exciting than watching grass grow. On Sunday afternoons we were often throughout the years drive by this tree and everyone would say, "That's the perfect oak." That's pretty exciting when you live in the country. I still drive by it when I get a chance at home. It's old. It's weary. It's breaking down. It's the only tree in probably a 100 acre plot. The rest of them are farm fields. It is still standing. Its roots are deep. It bears I'm sure lots of acorns. It's an old tree. And it hasn't withered through I'm sure well over 100 and some years and it has prospered in the midst of that.

That's what God wants us to be...well rooted. We want to stand firm, we want to produce fruit and God will bless us more than we can imagine if we would be available to God. And not so for the wicked. They are like the chaff that the wind blows away: Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement nor sinners in the assembly of righteousness.

Our group sent 4 thrashing machines about a month ago to Sierra Leone and I'll be taking parts there we need. You harvest the rice, it's got the stock on it like our wheat and barley and oats do here. And you get rid of that and you still have a shell around the rice. And if you rub the wheat or barley or anything together, pretty sure the shell comes off, that's the chaff. It's used for fire, it's thrown away. To this day they will throw the rice up in the air in these baskets and the chaff blows away and the rice remains.

God tells us we are here for the good and when we look at it, we look what it is with our own life, we have a choice of doing the right thing or God's heart is broken. And usually when we don't do the right thing, people around us, their hearts are broken too and they see our undue suffering from going down the wrong trails. The last verse: For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

I read this story, this is a city, an actual city in France and as it were, the Nazis were coming in. 1944, October and the word got to this American platoon leader that he had to take his troops in there to try to fortify the city. They didn't know how they were going to do it until the best news came: The news came that the French enlisted fighters were going around the city underground. They knew where the German posts were, they knew where the guns were, they knew where the artillery was set up. They knew and they drew up a map of the major stations and the streets through the town. The person in charge of the platoon gave this copy to his men and said: We have basically an hour to memorize this. I want you to do this so we don't have to send a lots of notes home of fatalities. They conquered that city in that afternoon. They rescued it from those who would destroy it even more. Thirty years later, 1974, there was a group of tourists there and someone decided to do a little study. They gave them the same map to see if they could find those posts and take them out as volunteers. They were unable to do it. The researcher said: Do you know why? They had nothing to lose. The people in 1944, if they didn't do what was done, they would have probably all lost their lives.

I don't know a clearer story of what the church of Jesus Christ is today. We need to stand up. We need to be light. We need to be hope and filled with the peace and speak to the world, or we are going down. I for one choose to be the light. Am I a good light every day? No, I fail. I am a sinner. But we cannot but try with all that we are, with our whole heart, with our whole body, with our whole soul to be all that Jesus Christ wants us to be and we will conquer darkness with light. That's the promise of the scripture because blessed himself will equip us to do. We go from I can't to we will because we fear this. Blessed is the one that delights in the law of the Lord and mediates day and night.

God is calling us today to be the light of Jesus Christ. And we've got it. We just need to walk and mediate it daily.

Prior to our offering today I want to share another piece of very good news. And this news is of thanksgiving. It is to give thanks with a grateful heart. In all the trials of finances in the last few years, we are, on behalf of the finance committee and our church council, grateful for your faithfulness. We give thanks and praise Almighty God. We celebrate you today. There was about a \$45,000 surplus at the end of this last year. Just like your home, that doesn't mean we are going out and spending it. But I do want to tell you some additional good news. I know your desires to pay off our mortgage, which is down to \$1.7 million. They have felt comfortable enough out of that to send \$10,000 more on that mortgage, so we have a very simple interest things, so it gets it down even faster. I'm here today just to say thanks be to God, but thanks to you. Could we give ourselves a praise and thanks be to Almighty God? (Applause.) You are so faithful to provide for the multiple ministries that take place here. We thank God that we are alive in this community and around the world. Praise be to God for all that we can be through Jesus Christ.