**Happy Wednesday Meditation by Reverend Victoria Ney 9/16/20**

Have you seen the TV news lately?  (Maybe you’ve stopped watching for the time being-again!)  Pandemic (still), rioting, horrible fires with lives lost, elections coming up and people heating up, no one being able to decide whether schools, church, restaurants, movie theaters, or places of work should be opened.

Joy seems to be in short supply, doesn’t it?

It seems as though everyone looks for it, but few seem to find it.  According to one study before the pandemic, only 33% of Americans described themselves as “happy.”  I don’t even want to think about what the percentage is now!  With everything going on around us, so many of us are living under a dark gray cloud.

Well, let’s see what we can do about it.  I believe happiness is available.  Finding it may take some work and redirection of habits, so let’s make happiness our quest.

According to the Bible, it all begins by managing the way you see people.

If you remember, Jesus was once asked to state the greatest command.  If only he had done just that!  If only Jesus had stopped with one command.  Seems like one would have been enough.  No one would have complained or asked for a second command.  In fact, only one was requested.

A religious leader asked Jesus:  “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

“The most important one is this,” answered Jesus…. “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this:  ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’  There is no commandment greater than these.”  (Mark 12:28-31 NIV)

Excuse me, Jesus.  How many answers did the man want?  One.

How many did he receive?  Two!

If only Jesus had stopped with one command, we could have been satisfied.  But he didn’t.  He offered a second, and it’s a doozy.  “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

With one sentence, Jesus actually gave us the pathway to genuine joy.  He brought it right into the middle of our traffic jams and conference meetings, and greeting strangers and neighbors and loving kids.

Get this:  Loving people is good for us.

Most people believe that people are the problem standing in the way of happiness.  Try to find a parking place and you can’t.  Why?  People.  Try to get in to see the doctor, and the next opening is two years from last Monday.  Why?  People.

All of life’s ups and downs can be traced back to people.  Car pileups.  Moral letdowns.  System foul-ups.  Emotional breakdowns.  Nasty words.  All because of people.

No wonder the Bible has so much to say about finding joy in the act of sharing joy with others.  Happiness happens when you give it away.  God’s solution for the ills of society—for what ails most of us—is being unselfish, doing random acts of kindness, saying words that affirm and help.

You see, as Christians, we’re called to be the one who adds something more to our day’s to-do list.  Whom can I help today?  Which person can I encourage?  Who needs a little sunshine?

It might just be the co-worker who gets on your nerves.  Or the neighbor who allowed their pet in your yard AGAIN.  Or the check-out clerk who seems like they’ve sucked on lemons for breakfast.  Yes, them.

God asks YOU to lift their spirits, brighten their days, compliment them, understand them, and thank them.  By doing that, the world, your world, will be different because you tried.

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”  Let’s put Jesus’ command to the test.  Let’s make others happy and see if we aren’t the ones who are the happiest.

Will you pray with me?

O Lord, people are rough—even the ones we love.

We hate that it’s hard to live here, and we hate the pain and suffering in our lives and in our world. Somehow, someway, O Lord, shed your light on our hearts.  Renew in us a right spirit.  We need you to light our way, so that we can have the joy you promised as we follow your Command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Amen.