

**Happiness7** *The Surest Way to be Happy Is to Make Others So* **Philip Gulley**

Last year, a new restaurant opened in North Salem. It's called Perillo's Pizza. I drove past it on my way to Roachdale to see my friend Charlie at the hardware store. I never stopped because I figured it was one of these pizza places that are like mushrooms, that pop up one day and are gone the next. Then some of the farmers at the hardware store started talking about how good it was, raving about it. These stoic farmers who have lost an entire year's crop in one hailstorm without shedding a tear, becoming emotional about the ravioli at Perillo's.

So the next Friday, on my way to the hardware store, I went through North Salem and stopped in at Perillo's to give it a try. And it is unbelievable. If God ever knocks on my door and wants lunch, I am taking him to Perillo's. That's how good it is. If you dropped dead, and the doctor pried open your mouth and fed you this ravioli, you would come back to life.

For the past couple of years, Joan and I have been talking about where we want to live when we retire. Maybe the farm, or maybe the mountains of North Carolina, maybe Florida in the winter. We talked about all those places. But now I want to retire to North Salem, and live in the apartment over Perillo's.

When they laid out the restaurant, they arranged it so the chef could watch people eat. You'll be eating and look up and there's the chef, watching you.

He has a heavy Italian accent, and yells out, "How do you lika your ravioli?"

As it turns out, I speak Italian, and you can too. You simply add the letters "A" or "O" to all your words. "It'sa perfecto," I yell back.

He smiles the biggest smile. This man was born to cook, born to bring gastronomical joy to others. It's his religion.

I went to college, read Kierkegaard and other famous philosophers whose names I can't spell, then met an Italian chef in North Salem, Indiana who has discovered the secret to happiness. *The surest way to be happy is to make others happy.* The surest way to be happy is to make others happy.

We've been talking about happiness these past few months, and the practices and attitudes that lead to it. We first said human happiness, our happiness and the happiness of others, was a worthwhile goal of religion. We've talked about the importance of goals, of waking up each morning with a good and noble purpose in mind. We've thought about the correlation between happiness and attitude, remembering that wonderful quote from Abraham Lincoln, that most folks are as happy as they make their minds up to be.

We said happy people nurture and cultivate healthy and positive relationships, that they know with whom to dwell, and with whom not to. When we were last together, we said those people who have happiness as their primary goal in life will seldom attain happiness. For in their haste to be happy, in their desire to be happy now, they will look for the shortcut to happiness, and no such shortcut exists. This morning, I want to suggest that one sure way to be happy is to make others happy.

I began this series by introducing you to Robert Ingersoll, a lost figure of history, rejected by many because he was an agnostic, but nevertheless a wise and loving man. Incidentally, while he didn't think well of most religions, he admired the Quakers for standing, he said, "on the side of freedom." Near the end of his life, he was asked to offer his creed, the guiding philosophy of his life. He said, "My creed is this: Happiness is the only good. The place to be happy is here. The time to be happy is now. The way to be happy is to make others so."

My sister is a nurse up at St. Vincent's and she learned that Larry the Cable Guy was going to be in Indianapolis doing a show. One of her patients was this little boy with a blood disorder who was always in and out of the hospital. This boy loved Larry the Cable Guy. He talked about him all the time. Larry the Cable Guy this, Larry the Cable Guy that.

So my sister phoned Larry the Cable Guy's manager to see if Larry the Cable Guy could stop by the hospital while he was in town to see this little boy and he agreed to. They didn't tell the little boy, they wanted it to be a surprise. Larry the Cable Guy walks in and this kid freaks out. He's laughing, Larry the Cable Guy is laughing. They're both tickled to death. I tell you, the surest way to be happy is to make others happy.

Huston Smith, in his book, *The World's Religions*, wrote about the divinity of Jesus and how that doctrine evolved. He said that when people saw Jesus, they began saying to themselves, "If God were to ever take on human flesh, Jesus is what it would look like." What was it about Jesus that made people think of God when they saw him? His power to heal? His wisdom? His compassion? Perhaps all those things. But I bet I know what the clincher was. His joy! Here was a man unswervingly devoted to the joy of others. Of course, he didn't make everyone happy. The politicians and the chief priests didn't think much of Jesus. Some people are that way. They can turn a summer parade into a funeral march. The hand-wringers. The doomsayers. The moaners. Don't ever tie your happiness to their happiness. Don't ever postpone your happiness until they are happy. There is not enough Prozac in the world to make some people happy. But whenever and wherever people were receptive to joy, whenever and wherever people had the capacity for joy, Jesus multiplied it.

He did so with his compassion, his kindness, his healing, his insight. Then, when the sun touched the far horizon and the day was done, he was happy because he made others happy. Do not for a moment believe in the gloomy Jesus who stands always before the cross with his head cast down. Do not for a moment believe in the dour Jesus who stood always with one foot in the tomb. Believe in the Jesus who laughed and healed and liberated and comforted and smiled and welcomed. Believe in the Jesus who set the feast at the table and welcomed everyone to it. Believe in that Jesus, then be like him, and you will be happy. For the surest way to be happy is to make others so.