



## **Put on a Happy Face**

A Sermon by Rev. Jerry L. McGlone  
December 31, 2006

I invite you to turn to the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 5; and I will be reading verses 10 & 11, and verses 43 through 48. These are the words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount.

***“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.***

***Blessed are you, when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”***

***“You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in Heaven.***

***For***

***He makes his Son rise on the evil, and on the good, and sends rain on the just, and on the unjust.***

***For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?***

***Do not even the tax collectors do the same?***

***But if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others?***

***Do not even the gentiles do the same?***

***You, therefore, must be perfect, as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”***

There's a story I've told my children many times, about one of the most important moments in my life. It's the story about the first time I fell in love. Actually, it's a story about the first two times I fell in love.

I was just a young boy, junior high school age, and my parents had taken me from our little town in southern Ohio, even though it was a college town, back then the streets folded up at about ten o'clock at night and all the lights went out; we went from that little town, to the big city of New York, my first time there.

We arrived at night. It was after midnight. And I remember walking on Times Square, with my mouth hanging open, as I gaped at all the lights in Times Square, and all the tall buildings that were surrounding me. It was love at first sight. That night I fell in love with New York City. And I still love to go there. I don't want to live there, but I want to go there for fun.

The next day we went to Radio City Music Hall. I was going to get to see the Rockettes. That was important to me. My cousin from another small town in Ohio, Newark, had gone and tried out for the Rockettes. And she was selected to be a Rockette, and then they measured her. And she was four feet ten inches tall, and they said, "You're too short... too short for the line of kickers."

But I was going to get to see the real Rockettes on the stage at Radio City Music Hall. Before the Rockettes would kick their way on stage, there was a first-run movie. Dad bought our tickets; we climbed up to the third balcony to find our seats. We were a little late. The movie was just starting. I remember hurrying up the tunnel which led from the foyer out to the balcony. When I got three quarters of the way up the tunnel, I saw the most marvelous, most beautiful sight I had ever seen in my life. The entire front of Radio City Music Hall had been transformed into one giant movie screen. If you've never been there, you can't imagine how big that movie screen is. It's just enormous.

But it wasn't the size of the movie screen that was marvelous and beautiful. It was what was on that screen. On that enormous screen, filling every inch of it was the very young, very gorgeous redheaded Ann-Margaret singing the opening song to "Bye, Bye Birdie." Any of you seen that? You know that opening scene. Imagine that. You know, the size of, I don't know, a ten story building.

It was love at first sight. I stopped in my tracks, three quarters of the way up that tunnel, captured and enraptured by the sight of Ann-Margaret.

She took my breath away in a split second. I was in love with Ann-Margaret, and I still am today.

But that experience might indeed have something to do with why I seem to like redheaded women. The memory of that thrill stays with me. My son remembered that story. And so for my birthday he sent me a DVD of “Bye, Bye, Birdie.” He wanted to help me re-live the thrill all over again.

Now there’s a song from that movie that has been haunting me recently. Unfortunately, it wasn’t a song sung by Ann-Margaret. She’s the one I loved from the first moment I laid eyes on her up there on that big screen at Radio City Music Hall. The song that haunts me was sung by somebody with whom I never fell in love. Actually, I don’t even like him. Dick Van Dyke sang the song. And I don’t like the song. But it’s been haunting me.

Dick Van Dyke sang:

*“Grey skies are gonna clear up  
Put on a happy face,  
Brush off the clouds and cheer up,  
Put on a happy face.*

*Take off the gloomy mask of tragedy,  
It’s not your style,  
You’ll look so good that you’ll be glad  
You decided to smile.*

*Pick out a pleasant outlook,  
Stick out that noble chin.  
Wipe off that full of doubt look,  
Slap on a happy grin.*

*And spread sunshine,  
All over the place.  
Just put on a happy face!”*

Here’s my problem: I know Dick Van Dyke is right. But I just don’t know how to put on a happy face right now. I know I’ve got to. I know I

should. I know how I have every reason to. But this last week I' ve been having some trouble putting on a happy face.

Now those of you, who know me well, know that I am a worrier. I guarantee you; none of you needs to worry about a thing because I worry enough for all of you. If you don' t believe that, ask Janet, my own private Ann-Margaret, and she' ll tell you what a worrier I am. In fact I can tell you that there are some redheaded women who think I may be a little obsessive-compulsive when it comes to worrying.

Here' s my problem: 2007 is going to arrive in just a few hours. It' s going to be here at midnight, a brand new year, a year filled with potential hope, and opportunity, a year filled with new horizons and great opportunities, and what do I do about it? I sit in a dark room and I put on a gloomy mask of tragedy and I worry about all the unknown bad things I' m afraid might happen.

I wonder. Do I have any sisters or brothers who worry with me today? Now, I ought to know better. I know Jesus said: "Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day' s own trouble be sufficient for the day."

I have a lot of trouble setting aside tomorrow' s anxieties even though I don' t know what they are. I have an uncanny propensity to borrow tomorrow' s unknown troubles and worry about them today. Do any of you do that?

I know Jesus is disappointed in me. But I' m sorry, Jesus. I' ve got a lot to worry about. I worry about my health. I worry about being a better husband. I worry about my children off in California. I worry about being an insensitive son. I worry about letting you people down and not being the pastor you deserve. I worry about the church and our future and all the people who are against us.

Here' s my problem: How does an expert, first-rate worrier like me, set aside all those tomorrow' s worries and put on a happy face for 2007? That darn Dick Van Dyke keeps singing in my head. He wants me to pick out a pleasant outlook, and stick out a noble chin. He tells me to wipe off that full of doubt look, and slap on a happy grin.

Have any of you ever seen a happy grin on my face in my life? Dick just won't leave me alone. He says I've got to spread sunshine all over the place and put on a happy face.

So, how do I do that? I start by paying attention to what the people who care about me have to say. My own personal Ann-Margaret, after 35 years of putting up with me, stubbornly refuses to sing "Bye, Bye, Jerry." And I'm so grateful and blessed to have her stay by my side. It's not easy to live with a worrier.

And she tells me, everything's going to be all right. My doctors tell me everything's going to be all right. My children tell me they're happy, healthy and gainfully employed, thank God. My father says he loves me.

You people have stood with me. You have supported me through many mistakes these last 22 plus years. When I pay attention to what the people who care about me have to say, I don't have a worry in the world.

A few days ago, Jan Tooke gave me a card with a note written on it. She told me to keep it on my desk and read it every day. Her note says: ***"Don't stress if you feel unsure at where you're going. Just take the journey one step at a time."*** Jan's right. Life is a journey. It's a marvelous, surprising, unknown journey. We all know it's filled with highs and lows, we know it's filled with victories and defeats; we know it's filled with joys and also disappointments. But no matter what comes, it's a journey you take one step at a time.

Now that's a lesson every worrier needs to learn. You don't have to worry about getting to the finish line. You worry about taking that next step. Just one at a time, and they'll get you there. I know that's a lesson my personal redheaded Ann-Margaret wants me to learn too. One step at a time, one day at a time.

Last Friday, Vic Baker called me up, and in a very caring, pastoral way, said he had a scripture passage he wanted me to read. It's from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Here's what Vic found, that Paul had to say to worriers like me:

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

*Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.*

*Paul's letter to the Philippians, Chapter 4, verses 4-9*

Vic's message to me through St. Paul, hit the mark. It doesn't matter what some of our future neighbors might say or do. You and I know what we're doing is honorable. It is just. Our motives are pure. We at the Church at Shawnee Landing are determined to stay loving and gracious. We will continue forward. The people will see our forbearance. And through it all, we will rejoice in the Lord.

Here's a message to all the worriers out there, and I'm at the top of the list: As long as we continue to rejoice in the Lord, we will pick out a pleasant outlook, we'll spread sunshine all over the place and we will put on a happy face. We'll have a happy face in 2007 no matter what.

It has been a rough week for us at the Church at Shawnee Landing. And I worry about how all of you are handling the stress and the animosity towards us as a church of God.

So let me tell you what our friends say: Paul Granville says don't worry. It'll blow over. Mike Riegel says, don't worry, we have all the necessary approvals. We have followed all the regulations and all the laws. All the funding is guaranteed. Don't pay any attention to some reports in the papers. Neither Senator Maziarz nor Congressman Reynolds will make any move to try to pull any funding. Their offices have assured us of that this Friday. They remain our strong supporters. The tax credits which supply the bulk of the funding have already been sold. The money's already there.

The Town Attorney, the Building Department, the Highway Department in the town have been backing us up all along. The neighborhood association which is fighting us has no legal argument to get an injunction or to stop us. Belmont Shelter is ready to sue the Town of Wheatfield if any further obstruction is attempted. And through it all, construction continues.

In an act of good will, we propose to offer to construct the road from Shawnee Road back to the apartments. This road will allow the heavy construction vehicles to stay off of Demler. It is a concession of good will to our neighbors. This is the road we're going to have to build for our church anyway. We're just going to be building it a month or two earlier. We will be talking about this following the church service.

If you want to stretch a metaphor, you could say we're choosing the high road. And that's a reason to put on a happy face, although I am dismayed that I have received no telephone calls, no e-mails, no letters of support from any of my fellow clergy members, not a one, not a whisper, not a word, not a contact.

There have been other members of the community that have reached out to me. I received an e-mail from a businessman in the community. He has written a letter to the editor of the local paper, which he said is supposed to be published in tomorrow's paper. He asked me to keep it quiet until it is published, and I don't see any news people here. But I'm still not going to reveal his name at this time, or much of the content of his letter. But I want to share with you all a very few of his closing words.

These are his words, a businessman in this community, whom I do not know: ***“Most people do not try to be poor,”*** he writes. ***“People always want the best for their families, and try their hardest to achieve that. But along the way, things can happen. Damning circumstances may have occurred which brought them down: job losses, bankruptcy, a death in the family, poor health. These poor may even be in a stage of transition in their lives, striving for a new and better life. Therefore, at any given time, a poor person could be anyone and every one of us. She could be a little old lady living on her own. He could be a young man fresh out of the armed forces and starting a civilian life. She could be a single mom trying to eke out a living for her children. He could be a young college graduate, soon becoming a teacher in the area. They are all people we know and***

*love. They may be poor momentarily, but not poor in character. Why would you not want these people as your neighbor?"*

You see, he gets it. He understands what we're trying to build. He understands our mission. And if he gets it, there are other people out in the community who get it too. And I responded to him that he represents the heart and soul of the people in this community, the people who care and love, the people who welcomed me and my family, the people who make me proud to call this place my home. People like him, help me put on a happy face.

Now some of you may be wondering why I chose the scripture from the Sermon on the Mount for today's sermon, especially since I haven't mentioned it and I'm at the end of the sermon.

Well here's why. In my thirty years as an ordained minister in pastoral ministry, I have never felt like I was on the outside because I'm a Christian. It's been pretty easy to be a Christian so far in my life. I haven't come up against any opposition. I haven't had my motives questioned, I haven't stirred up much controversy, at least not outside the controversy we've had inside our own church. Society has simply accepted me and left me alone. This is a Christian society, so I'm a Christian and people just accept me; until now.

For the first time in my ministry, I can start to understand what Jesus was talking about in His Sermon on the Mount. Our church and our mission have been persecuted. All kinds of evil have been uttered falsely against us. And Jesus says when that happens, my response should be to rejoice and be glad.

For the first time, being a Christian is costing me something in the community. For the first time, my Christian witness is calling me to stand up for something in my community. For the first time, my Christian faith is calling me to persevere and to live with forbearance, taking it one step at a time. And that's something to put on a happy face about.

And there's one last thought I want to share. I momentarily felt a bit sour about the location of our new home on Shawnee Road and I asked myself do I really want to build a church out there among all those nasty people who don't want us?

And the answer I came up with is **absolutely, yes.**

Shawnee Road is exactly where our church's mission belongs. For the first time since we started this project, I see that we need to be there. We need to show by our actions, by our words, by our presence that the Christian message is a message of welcome. It is a message of open arms to all kinds of people, all classes of people, rich and poor, thick and thin, short and tall. No matter what your life has been like, the Christian home is open to you.

And we open our arms with acceptance, with forgiveness, and that our church will be a place of second chance.

All of those are things I want in my life. And all of those are things I want to offer to the people who are going to live in our apartments. And I want to offer those things to all the people who live in the \$400 thousand dollar houses down the road, and I want to offer those things to all the rest of us who live somewhere in between.

We can show them all that Jesus loves all his children, and that his children are capable of loving each other. I'm not worried about that.

So I'm going to put on a happy face and welcome 2007 with hope, with trust, and with faith. How about you?