

St. Andrew's UMC
May 18th, 2008
Matthew 28:16-20
"Teaching Them To Obey Everything"

Are you happy? Or, are you rather less happy than you think you should be? Why do people feel happy or unhappy?

I think I found the explanation in an article that a writer from [LiveScience.com](http://www.livescience.com) wrote. Yahoo News reported the article about a couple weeks ago. Two researchers from New York University conducted a research. The researchers based their findings on both U.S. and more internationally focused surveys.

The writer of the article mentioned another research which Pew Research Center conducted in 2006, whose findings supported the result of the New York team's research. The New York researchers found that individuals with conservative ideologies are happier than those with liberal leanings. The 2006 survey of the Pew Research Center found that: "47% of conservative Republicans in the U.S. described themselves as "very happy," while only 28 percent of liberal Democrats indicated such cheer."

I do not know much about pursuing liberty and justice for all, but if happiness is what you want, the research seems to point to something solidly scientific: based on these researches, I must concede what I feared—if you want happiness, vote Republican.

Now, before you decide to run me out of town, and before we lose our tax-exempt status, let me say a few things first. The research said that, "regardless of marital status, income, or church attendance, right-wing individuals reported greater life satisfaction and well-being than leftwingers."

Then the article reported why that is the case: “the conservatives also scored highest on measures of rationalization, which gauge a person’s tendency to justify, or explain away, inequalities.”

The researchers measured the rationalization with examples such as these: “It is not really that big a problem if some people have more or a less chance in life than others,” and “This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are.”

If you hold the view that harbors such rationalizations, then you tend to justify economic inequalities, the article said, “and you would adapt the idea of meritocracy, in which people move up their status in society based on hard work and good performance. That way one’s social class achievement, whether upper, middle, or lower, would be perceived as totally fair and justified.”

Contrarily, if your beliefs do not allow you to justify the inequality, you could be left frustrated and disheartened, according to the researchers: “Our research suggests that inequality takes a greater psychological toll on liberals than on conservatives,” they wrote, “apparently because liberals lack ideological rationalization that would help them frame inequality in a positive (or at least neutral) light.”

There. Now you know why you have been cranky and ornery for no good reason all these years.

The researchers posited that the findings could also apply to the personal situations, as well: “There is no reason to think that the effects we have identified here are unique to economic forms of inequality. Research suggests that highly egalitarian women are less happy in their marriages compared with their more traditional counterpart, apparently because they are more troubled by disparities in domestic labor.”

Husbands, have you wondered why your wives are unhappy? That is because the hubby sits in front of TV, and does not share the household chores. I wish I had read this, years earlier.

If the research discovered the reasons for cranky liberals and wives, it would also shed light on the prophetic writings of the Bible. You get the sense that these prophets were ornery type of people who always showed up uninvited to say mean things to the regular folk.

Well, if you are so offended by injustice, and have no such faculty as rationalization, you would be cranky. If you are committed to justice and righteousness, then all the injustice and corruption would be the constant sources of stress in the fundamental level of your being.

It is not necessarily the sign of a good thing, therefore, if you can sleep well. It could be the sign that one rationalizes so well, or that one may lack the sense of justice and righteousness. If ignorance is bliss, rationalization is happiness, it appears.

If we look at the world from the perspective the aforementioned research highlighted, the physical violence Jesus employed in the temple to upturn the moneychangers' tables and drive out the merchants was motivated by his keen sense that something was profoundly wrong.

Jesus could not rationalize the phenomenon, and get on with his life, not worry, and be happy. In the Bible, we do not see Jesus as a happy man, but rather as a man of the troubled spirit, who had no place to rest his head, who picked fight with those who are in charge—the high priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees.

Jesus told his disciples after his resurrection, as Matthew's account tells us, to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,

baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

This statement has been revered by the Christians as the “Great Commission” for centuries, and they carried out their endeavor of evangelizing the world. For the modern Christians, it is worth examining what the Great Commission exactly means for today’s world.

Did Jesus tell his disciples that they are commissioned to turn Christianity into *the* one world religion? Did Jesus mean that the post-Jesus world is to be populated only by the Christians? If that is what he meant, the Christian disciples failed miserably, given the 20 centuries of time to do it.

Or, did Jesus mean that the Christians are given the task of teaching them to obey everything that he commanded them—like giving up all the possessions, turning the other cheek, loving one’s enemies, and loving one’s neighbor as one’s self, etc. How about the Golden Rule? Do I have to obey the Golden Rule, as well?

Maybe we could separate the sayings of Jesus into 3 reasonable categories: commandments, guidelines, and suggestions. Of course, we know giving up all our possessions would have to belong to the category of guidelines or suggestions. Isn’t that a rational thing to do?

Oh, I have a question for Jesus: does loving one’s enemy include loving the enemy combatants, too? Should I give a terrorist a glass of cold water and a warm meal, just because he was thirsty and hungry, even though the law says I can’t? Can I obey what you commanded me on Sundays, while I waterboard the suspected terrorists on weekdays?

Then again, many Christians are wont to obey, and even endorse, if not enforce, the belief that marriage is only between a man and a woman. The problem is that Jesus did not teach us what to do about the marriage between the same sex.

So, I ask you, Jesus: do we heterosexuals have to let the homosexuals to marry whoever they want to marry, just as we marry whomever we want to marry? Do we have to let them enjoy full range of rights, just as we do? Does your Golden Rule assume equality, justice, and righteousness for every one? Or can we rationalize away your Golden Rule, too?

Today, we United Methodists observe Peace with Justice Sunday. Also today is Trinity Sunday, meaning, that Jesus is a person of the Trinity, the triune God. By observing this day, we confess our faith that Jesus is not only human but also divine.

When we think about peace, we remember what Jesus said in his teaching: Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Mt. 5:9). Did Jesus mean that making peace means to quell any dissidents? It would be indeed peaceful, if everyone agreed on issues. It would be peaceful, if there were no dissidents.

In this kind of peace, there are no troublemakers, but also there is no freedom of speech. And we know this kind of peace as dictatorship. It is actually stability disguised as peace.

The ancient Chinese conceptualized peace (or rather, harmony) as food in every mouth. When some one is hungry, while others are filled, there is no peace.

This concept of peace assumes equality: an equal access to food. When some people are forced to go without food, shelter, or clothing, we call it poverty. Others call it getting what they deserved, based on their rationalization of this inequality. Poverty

is one tenacious form of injustice. Without justice, peace cannot be.

It appears that the sense of happiness might depend on the ability to rationalize the inequality. It seems to work well—very well, especially—when I am the have, and others are the have-nots.

Is it what Jesus taught, through his Great Commission, to make everyone a Christian? The history tells me that the very process of making others Christian caused so much bloodshed and pain. I am not sure, if killing and subjugating others, militarily or economically, is how we make disciples of Jesus. We should know we are making anything but Christian disciples in Iraq or Afghanistan .

Jesus never intended to create one world religion. Certainly, Jesus never intended to replace the Hebrew religion with the new religion that we call, Christianity. Jesus rather intended his disciples to be God's children, to live like God's children, and to love like God's children.

Jesus rather expected his disciples to make peace—and do it with justice and righteousness, and with compassion and love. That is what he taught, but his disciples forgot what the Great Commission was about. They focused instead on imperialism, and practiced subjugating other people in the name of Jesus.

Jesus showed us how to become God's children. So that is what we shall do: we will make peace, as we are God's children. And we will do it with justice.