



**“Who are These People?”**  
**Lenten Study 2018 — Week Two**  
**Rev. Randy Cross**  
**Northeast District Superintendent**  
**Dakotas Conference**

---

***What makes you happy? Facebook is full of pictures of the things that many in America today believe makes them happy: puppies, babies, wonderful food about to be eaten. But is that what truly makes you happy?***

In the second chapter of his book, "Make a Difference", James Harnish offers another idea of happiness, or at least a different image of happy people, that we should explore during this second week of Lent.

Hi, I am Randy Cross, superintendent of the Northeast district of the Dakotas Conference of the United Methodist Church, and it is my pleasure to spend some time with you today.

Happiness, the pursuit of happiness is woven into our nation's Declaration of Independence. How do we define happiness? Maybe looking at the opposite meaning would help. The opposite of happy is despair, depression, misery, worry, discouragement, or just plain sadness—gloomy words. What brings these feelings to life is the plain fact that we are missing our heart's call and desire. Things are out of whack – life is not what we hoped it would be – we are not happy. There is no focus, no purpose and no significance to our living.

So, let's turn it around. Could it be that happiness exists in our lives when we find a significant way to live? Happiness arises out of something much more profound than puppies in a basket, as cute as that is.

Jim Harnish quotes Albert Schweitzer, "The only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought, and found how to serve." Can it be that happiness comes to us when we help others find happiness themselves? When we take on the role of servant to others? When we stop striving after accumulating the "stuff" of this world, and instead, begin to experience the root desire of caring for others, of serving and enhancing their lives? Sure seems that way.

One of the core beliefs for me is that joy comes in living a significant life. Joy comes in living a significant life. We find meaning, purpose and joy in our lives by lifting the lives and hopes of others. We radiate the sense of purpose and hope by serving others, and removing their burdens.

It is a strange and wonderful paradox. We are able to receive the gifts of joy and happiness only when we give ourselves away for others. We have all known and experienced people who live that way, haven't we? These folks enter our lives, and the world is brighter. We want to be with these persons, because they seem to have discovered a beautiful way to live. They are free from the burdens of the things we chase after: possessions, power, status, accomplishment, acknowledgement. Instead, they have a wonderful capacity to give, and an energy that helps them do what needs to be done to brighten this world.

If we had the strength and the courage, we would want to be like them, to be the light of the world. The trouble is, it means giving away those things that draw us in the opposite direction, and that keep us from finding our heart's call and desire, from finding our own joy in a significant life of service. That's a hard path to begin to walk on. When we give up this behavior, to take on a life that is 180 degrees opposite, it almost feels as though we are in a dark place, even a scary place. How can we possibly make a transition to a significant life of joy?

Jim Harnish is quick to affirm that it is not something we do, like creating a new habit. To receive the power to live for others is a gift that comes from God. To make a difference in this world means that we first must allow the grace of God through Jesus Christ to make a difference in our own lives.



That happens, friends, through prayer. So, how is your prayer life? Is it hit and miss, just grace at meals, or when we have a scary thing come into our lives or the lives of those we love? Prayer is the fundamental connection we make with God. It is like laying down the paving stones on a path to God. When we open our hearts regularly, consistently and intentionally to God in prayer, God begins to create a new perspective for us to take on. It is a new reality of what is important and significant. We also learn what we can set aside so that we have the capacity to give and to love and to serve. We become clearer that we are branches, and that Jesus is the vine. Our strength, energy and focus come from staying connected in this important way, daily. We listen, and find a silent place where God can speak, and then receive the courage to live as a gift, an opportunity to bring happiness and hope to another person, to make a difference.

***I invite you to seek the joyful life of serving others, and making a difference for them. I invite you today, to also begin that important and powerful discipline of prayer, that indeed will free you to serve. God bless you this week, as you travel the Lenten journey.***