



Looking Out My Window, October 1, 2022

While serving as associate rector at St. James' Episcopal Church in Marietta, Georgia, someone asked me, "Are you happy at St. James?" In that moment, thoughts and images flashed across the horizon of my awareness--faces, conversations, hugs, affirmations, tears, certain moments in worship together. And, my answer to the question came almost at the speed of those lightening-flash images. "Absolutely!"

That question prompted reflection on what constitutes happiness for me. Actually, it surprised me that the question had not occurred to me, and that I do not think about that very much. It's not that my life has no happy or unhappy moments; it's just that I do not normally frame life in terms of happy/unhappy.

I view reality through specific frames, like looking out through windows. That question about happiness forced reflection on those evaluative frames. Just what are they? The "happiness frame" seems to me to be an output issue. What am I getting out of life? The questioner's inquiry brought me to the awareness that my evaluative frames fall more into the input category. Am I being responsible? Am I relating to God openly and faithfully? Am I being faithful to my calling and to my relationships? Am I living with integrity? Are my practices and my values coming more fully into agreement? Am I listening to my own deepest inner voice and to the inner whisper of God?

Yet, it keeps proving elusive to remember that the quality of the outputs--happiness, contentment, serenity, etc.--depends on the quality of the inputs--faithfulness, responsibility, loving service, integrity, etc. When I focus on the outputs, what life is giving me, those outputs diminish in quality. My only influence on the outputs comes from the quality and consistency of the inputs. It still surprises me that "Am I happy?" does not often occur to me as a question. I hope happiness keeps eluding me as a goal. Yet, sometimes I forget that it makes a lousy goal.

Not only am I a verbose reflector, I'm also a persistent forgetter.

God's peace,

*David+*

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