

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

HAPPINESS

Lately I have found myself asking people if they are happy. I might even have asked you! Someone asked me in turn "What is happiness?" my immediate response was to say "whatever you choose it to be!" But is it? This week I saw a magazine headline that said something like 'Happiness is a skill we can learn.' I have happiness on my mind, and so these two ideas have been spinning round in my head. The media tells us that happiness is a trip to Fiji, or a new car or the capacity to purchase some commodity: to have something or to go somewhere. In the First Testament, it is suggested to us that happiness is a reward for doing the right thing. Perhaps we can more helpfully see this as health and security and enough to live well. This takes us closer to a perspective we might hear in Jesus' teaching. 'Happy' and 'blessed' are very close concepts in the Bible and often used inter-changeably! It seems to me, then, that happiness is akin to the sense of wellbeing that comes with living the way of Christ: compassionately, justly, peacefully, lovingly. In this way of thinking, happiness has nothing to do with having *things*. Rather it is an attitude to life and to living that we can learn from our mentors and peers. We can learn to see the 'glass half full', as they say, rather than half empty - which is the default view for many of us. We can learn to consider ourselves in relation to those for whom we experience compassion rather than those whom we envy; we can choose to take good care of our physical bodies, our mental health, our relationships, and our spiritual health. All these things take time and practice and we are easily diverted into busyness. Stopping and taking time to consider deeply, is a key to happiness and *feeling* happy. So as I ponder, it seems we can be happy within whatever circumstances we find ourselves living. And we can practice the attitudes that enable us to experience life and love, and whatever we have and are, as blessings. We do not really need 'things' to be happy - just an open heart and mind, and time to learn to consider what gives life.