

## **2025 02 16 – *Blessing & Woe***

**Scripture: Luke 6:17-26** (*The Inclusive Bible*)t

Jesus has just spent the night in the mountains praying. At daybreak he gathers his disciples together and comes down the mountain. When they get to a level area, a plain, Jesus stops and here he is surrounded by a great number of his disciples and a large crowd of people who have gathered from Judea and even as far away as the Mediterranean coast. These people have come to be healed by this touch and inspired by his word.

Looking at his disciples, Jesus speaks words that have puzzled and disturbed Christians for centuries. Jesus tells the poor, the hungry, the sad and the hated that they are blessed. And, if that isn't strange enough, he then goes on to say "woe to you" to the rich, the full, the happy and the honoured. It sounds like Jesus is telling his disciples and all those in the crowd, that their position in life, their wealth, their happiness, their status is all about to be turned upside down.

I know that most of us in this congregation are sitting in our pews with full stomachs. Most of us have enough income that we are at least comfortable, if not rich. Most of us have friends and maybe even admirers. Most of us have recently experienced the joy of laughter. So does that mean that God is unhappy with us? Does it mean that most of us are about to find ourselves in very different circumstances?

The quick answer to those questions is, “No.” Jesus was not saying that being happy or making a comfortable living or having a reasonable pension is a bad thing. But Jesus is teaching about the coming reign of God. This reign of God is a time of peace and justice, a time when things will be turned upside down or, at least, leveled out. Jesus’ good news, Jesus’ gospel, is the promise of a world where everyone will have enough and where no one will hoard all the riches for themselves.

We know this because of scripture passages that we have recently explored in the Gospel of Luke. For instance, on the Sunday before Christmas, we read Mary’s song, the Magnificat, where she says,

You have shown strength with your arm;  
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;  
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones ;  
and raised the lowly to high places.  
You have filled the hungry with good things,  
while you have sent the rich away empty. (Luke 1:51-53)

Or the passage that we explored just three weeks ago—Jesus’ inaugural speech—when he reads from Isaiah saying,

The Spirit of God is upon me:  
because the Most High has anointed me  
to bring Good News to those who are poor. (Luke 4:18a)

I believe Jesus words of blessing are definitely meant as good news for the poor and the hungry and the sad and the reviled. And yes, I think the words of woe

are a warning for those of us who are rich and self-centred, who care only for our own happiness and comfort.

But I certainly don't think that God is about to punish those of us who are doing well in life. I believe, as we said in our Call to Worship this morning, we are all blessed by the Holy Mystery, the Essence of Love. I believe that God's love is unconditional. God isn't about to punish us for being rich and, on the other hand, any wealth we may have is not a reward from God either. Being wealthy or happy or even famous doesn't mean that God loves us any more or less.

So if the woes are not saying that being rich, satisfied, happy and well thought of are bad things, then what are they saying? I believe that Jesus is reminding his disciples and the crowd who are also listening, that sometimes in our search for happiness, for status and wealth we end up losing sight of those things that are truly important. Sometimes we are so busy being filled with material things that we end up ignoring our spiritual needs. We end up feeling hungry, never fully satisfied, because of our lack of connection with the Divine. It is difficult to maintain a deep connection to God if our lives are filled with the worship of other things.

When we are truly connected with the Holy Mystery, then we become aware that our very presence here on earth is a blessing and that the accumulation of fortune and fame is not the way to true happiness and joy. We become aware that what we are and what we have is enough. We become aware that more is not always better.

I also believe that Jesus is teaching us that when we are truly connected to the Divine, then we also become aware of our connection with all of God's creation, with the entire world and even with the universe. When that connection becomes a part of us then it impacts all the decisions that we make in our lives. Including the decisions about how we treat other people and the earth itself. When that connection is deep then we realize that the accumulation of fame and fortune is not as important as the relationships that we build with our family, our friends and our neighbours. We realize that the destruction of even one part of God's creation impacts every being on earth.

Every day I receive an email blog from Richard Rohr, the founder of the Centre for Action and Contemplation. Richard Rohr saw a deep need for the integration of both service (action) and spiritual connection (contemplation) because the two are inseparable. When we satisfy our hunger for spiritual connection then we can't help but live out our call for service in our world. When we are rooted in the Divine, the Essence of Love, then our actions will be based in that love. They will be based in compassion.

I believe Jesus' messages of woe are an invitation to those of us who currently have a degree of wealth or power in this world to do what we can to bring about God's reign on earth, and thus to make possible the blessings that he is also preaching. We are being called to do our part to turn things upside down and to level out the imbalances that have taken hold of our world. We are being called to a deep connection with the Holy Mystery and a deep compassion for all of God's creation. May it be so. Amen.