



Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, For yours is the kingdom of God."
– Luke 6:20

Jesus intends that his disciples – his church- should be blessed. The church should be “lucky” people. He used the term “blessed,” which means utterly satisfied, at peace, in joy. The word is used in its extreme form for the birth of a baby. That is the true blessed event when everyone is relieved, safe, full of joy and expectation, because the world seems innocent and we begin again. That is the kind of well-being Jesus intends for his disciples.

But Jesus’ notion of blessed is a demanding one; his comments are in a tone of instruction and obedience. He require that the disciples have completely different take on the present:

blessed are you poor;

blessed are you who are hungry;

blessed are you who weep now;

blessed are you when people hate you and exclude you and defame you.

These are hard sayings to the church. Blessed is the church that does not easily come to terms with the present, that keeps loose and open enough, restless enough to know that the present arrangements of reality are not good enough, and that they are not the way God intends them.

If you take that list of poor, hungry, weeping, hated, it means that the church is to be odd in the world, noticed in the community for walking to a different drummer. What Jesus intends is that the church should share in the suffering of Jesus, the Good Friday suffering of Jesus, because Jesus’ way in the world is not popular or safe.

Jesus counters the blessed with the opposite word “woe”, which means “big trouble.” The extreme case of woe is death, sadness, failure, defeat. And so he says “woe” four times about those who have come easily to terms with the present:

woe to those who are rich;

woe to those who are full now;

woe to those who are laughing now;

woe to those of whom all speak well.

Woe-trouble-to those who have settled in on the present tense as though this were the end and culmination of everything, who are satisfied, comfortable, at ease, accommodating, without the alertness and the critique of the suffering of Jesus

Christians are blessed when they maintain an awareness and a practice of the present, remembering that this present is not who God wills it.

God of discontent, you are not satisfied with the present state of the world – and you expect us not to be satisfied with it either. Teach us to identify with the suffering of Jesus in this world and so to live into the blessing you desire for us and for all. Amen.