

3rd Sunday before Lent

I stand here in need of God's mercy and grace. May I speak in the name of the God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Blessed are you... Those words of Jesus can be really good to hear, when we are struggling to make ends meet, when we are mourning, when life is tough and unfair.

**Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.
Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.**

God stands with the poor, the hungry and all those who mourn and suffer. And God will bring justice, will level the play field and put all things to right. We are not alone in our suffering, God sees us. Because in our weakness, as we face injustice, as life brings hurt and loss, we can trust in the God, who stands with us.

It feels a little different though to hear: "Woe to you..." It is harder to identify ourselves as the rich, as those who are full and enjoying life, those who are respected and well thought of. Identifying ourselves with those Jesus calls blessed is easier, than considering, that actually, we might also be those addressed with:

**But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.**

To think these words might also at times be meant for us is harder to accept. Blessed are you... Woe to you...

There are many different ways that one or the other or both might mean us. Today I would like us to reflect on these two contrasts a bit in the light of climate change and the many dangers God's good creation is faced with as a result of human greed.

Climate change is destroying livelihoods, causing famine and widespread death and destruction all around the world. It is often the already more vulnerable, who are hit hardest. Here among us this might be felt with rising food prices, which some of us might not notice much, but for others this means struggling to buy enough food for themselves and their loved ones. Blessed are you... Pollution of water, soil and air again often hit hardest the communities already experiencing great injustices, discrimination and oppression due to for example their socio-economic status or their ethnicity. Here in London air pollution is a major issue and can seriously affect the health and life expectancy of people. Blessed are you...

Yet climate change and pollution are a result of human actions. And whether we like it or not, living in England, we are part of the society that mainly contributes to climate change and pollution through the way we live. We are part of structures and mechanisms that profit of exploitation and greed, that disregards that we do not own God's creation, but are merely stewards of it. We are part of God's beautiful and wonderful creation, which sustains us and nurtures us, but our greed and selfishness leads to the kind of exploitation that now threatens to destroy the beauty and wonder of God's good gift. Woe to you...

Pollution and climate change might already significantly affect you and your loved ones in one way or another. Increased numbers of people with asthma, anxiety and depression in the face of climate change, people's health and safety being affected during ever more extreme heat waves... Does any of that sound familiar? Blessed are you...

But at the same time, we also contribute to this increasingly dangerous situation. Woe to you... What Jesus' beatitudes tell us, that God's will is for justice, for all to have enough, for all to be able to flourish, for there to be an end to suffering and death. Climate change and pollution are big structural problems, and none of us can solve these problems on our own, but together we can apply pressure on those who hold power to effect real change. And we each can make small changes, be a little less wasteful, sacrifice some of our luxury and comfort, if all of us do one or two little things, it could make a real difference.

The greed and selfishness that fuel climate change and pollution are sinful and in one way or another we are likely all caught up within sinful systems and structures, that cause the destruction of God's precious creation. Lent is fast approaching, a time to reflect, to repent of the ways in which we have fallen short and try and change the way we act. Today children's church is creating a tree, that will stand in the church here throughout Lent. A Lent Pledge Tree, on which all who would like to find one small way during this season of Lent to reflect and change, to act with greater care for God's creation, are invited to stick their Lent pledge. There will be sticky leaves on which all who wish to participate can write their particular pledge. There is a sheet at the back with some ideas of what one could pledge, to help you reflect, what kinds of actions or habits each of us could commit to.