May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Blessed are the poor, the hungry, and the ones who are weeping. But woe to the rich, the full, and the ones who are laughing.

Poverty over riches, hunger over fullness, and weeping over laughing. Are those the priories you have in your life today? Is that what you want for yourself? Your spouse and children? Your grandchildren? Is that the kind of life you are living today?

Let me just start by saying I don’t like those priorities. That’s not what I grew up believing. That’s not what I aspired to. That’s not how I want to live my life. And I am pretty sure that’s not the dream my parents had for me. It’s sure not the dream I have for my kids and wife.

Jesus has a way of messing with our expectations of what really matters, our beliefs about how we should live, and our aspirations for the direction of our life. More often than not he reverses the usual expectations, beliefs, and aspirations. His view of what life, meaning, power, and success look like – what we might call the Kingdom of God – is mostly at odds with the world’s view and sometimes our own. And if today’s gospel is a hard message to hear, it’s an even harder life to live.

I don’t think Jesus is talking about what or how much we have or don’t have. It’s not about a bottom-line calculation of our bank balance, the number of meals or calories we get each day, or whether we spend more time crying than laughing. Jesus is talking about a quality not a quantity.

He is talking about how we are in the world, not what we are, but *how* we are. And I know from my own life that when I am poor, hungry, weeping, whether materially, emotionally, or spiritually, I am more open and receptive. I am looking for something new, a different way of being in the world. But when I am rich, full, and laughing, whether materially, emotionally, or spiritually, I mostly want more of the same. I am not looking for anything new or different. I work to defend and keep the status quo.

Maybe the blessings and woes are descriptive of two different ways *how’s* of our life. One in which our hearts, hopes, and aspirations are turned toward the coming of something new, something different. We are open to the future, to one another, to the possibility of what seems impossible. And where there is a future there is life, and more life. The other way of being in the world, the other how, is closed to the future, to each other, to something new or different. We are self-enclosed and self-sufficient. We are bound to the world as it is. It has become our treasure.

What if we were to think of blessings and woes as guides to making the kingdom present?

My kids love to play the hot and cold game? Someone picks an object in the room but doesn’t identify it to the other players. The others players move about searching for the object and are told “You’re warm. Yes, you’re getting warmer. Oh, now you’re cold. You’re ice cold.” It’s a way of telling the players if they are close to or far from the object. What if blessings and woes are Jesus saying we are either warm or cold toward the kingdom, getting close to or moving away from it?

You see the kingdom is not a place or a time or a thing, but a way of being in this world. You and I give existence to the kingdom by the how of our being in the world. The kingdom is God’s it is God’s call to us. And it is up to us to respond and make it present. And sometimes we do.

The kingdom comes, is actually here, is really real, whenever we love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, pray for those who abuse us, turn the other cheek to those who strike us, welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, forgive our offender, give to the beggar.

Every time we do to others as we would have them do to us we give existence to the kingdom.

Have you ever thought of yourself as having the privilege and responsibility of giving existence to the kingdom? Have you ever thought that God might need you as much as you need God? Have you ever thought of yourself as a holy, as one whose how of life matters and makes a difference to others and to the world? Amen.