

I wish I could base my sermon this morning on Cinderella. I think you all know the story. Poor Cinderella – even her name echoes poverty - cinders – what is left after the coal has all been burned – poor Cinderella, treated like a slave by her wicked step-mother and her evil step-sisters. But as Disney tells the story even the birds love Cinderella for her heart is pure and she is filled with love. I wish this morning I could say that Jesus was really telling the story of Cinderella – that God will bless the pure-hearted, deserving poor and God will curse the evil, wicked, mean-spirited, nasty rich ones who despise the poor and who oppress the poor and who have no regard for the justice of God. We delight in teaching our children the story of Cinderella for it is a story that sets everything right. Cinderella, riding off with Prince Charming – the wicked step-mother and step-sisters defeated, disgraced. This is the way it ought to be with God – judgement for the wicked, heaven for the good.

But one day when Jesus was with a great crowd of people who had come to be healed by him – touched by him, Jesus looked at his disciples and said, “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungering now, you will be filled. Blessed are you who are weeping now, you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you, rich, you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, you 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.”

Blessed are you, poor. Woe to you, rich. Jesus forgot the part about being pure or being wicked.

Woe to you who laugh now – what if the laughter is just good clean fun – celebrating life kind of laughter – why would Jesus declare that the laughers will mourn and weep? And what if those who weep now are crying over their own foolishness – crying because they spent tomorrow’s income yesterday. Why does Jesus declare them blessed?

And what about the people who are praised for being good and responsible? Why does Jesus compare them to the false prophets?

I'd rather have the story of Cinderella – a world where good wins out and evil gets clobbered. Even if the world is not like that I would like to believe it is.

We call Cinderella a fairy tale. A nice story to believe, but not true. And Jesus' words?

Well, Jesus was really quite popular when he spoke these words. People were coming from everywhere to hear him. Yet Jesus taught, Woe to you when all speak well of you, for so your ancestors did to the false prophets.

But somewhere between the Palm Sunday Parade and Good Friday the crowd turned on Jesus. And suddenly he was being hated and excluded reviled and defamed. Somewhere between Palm Sunday and Good Friday Jesus was weeping for Jerusalem – weeping over the city because his reaching out to Jerusalem had failed. Some time on Good Friday Jesus who had taught that God clothes the grass of the field better than Solomon in all his glory and that God will clothe us as well – on Good Friday Jesus was stripped of his clothing - crucified, naked. And on Good Friday Jesus who had been rich in friends who provided all he needed – a gift to him – Jesus would thirst dying on the cross the poorest one of all – his friends watching from a distance.

No Prince Charming came to rescue him.

What kind of a God is this that allows what happened to Jesus to happen? What kind of a God is this that could let all the sacrifices of committed soldiers and the sorrow of their families get swallowed up by the mess that Iraq is today? What kind of a God is this that lets a child be born into a home where a father or a mother just does not care? God is the kind of God that sends God's Son to say, "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. blessed are you who hunger and weep and are reviled. Better days are coming for you. But woe to you rich, you who laugh and are full and are honored." Days of suffering are coming for you.

What are you to do with these words of Jesus? Hold them in your heart. Let them be words of hope and words of warning for you.

Sometimes we think that life is just going to go on like it is now forever. It will not. Sometimes when we are grieving it feels like laughter will never come again. Jesus wants you to know it will.

Sometimes when we seek to follow Jesus we get clobbered. You sacrifice to build up this church or to build up a broken-down one and others are irresponsible and it seems as if your sacrifice is wasted. Jesus wants you to know it is not.

Sometimes life is going great. You think it will forever. Jesus wants you to be ready for the day everything turns.

Sometimes you can do nothing wrong and everyone is patting you on the back – Jesus does not want you to judge yourself by that but by how much you are true to him for false prophets have always been honored for inviting people to live without sacrifice.

We do not live in a fairytale world but in a world where the holy Son of God is crucified. God will have the last word – Jesus raised from the dead is our promise of that – but until then we are called to faith and to a life of sharing and caring and forgiving. Our poverty will not save us nor will our riches – Jesus will.

Remember that. Amen.