

**Holy Trinity Sunningdale**  
**Sunday 16 February, 2025 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday before Lent**  
**Readings – Psalm 1 & Luke 6:17-26 – Blessings and Woes**

I had mixed emotions when I first saw the readings for today. With dismay, I wondered how to present both blessings and woes in the same talk but thankful that I know Psalm 1 very well because it was my father's favourite Psalm. My dad was so fond of this Psalm that he would never say it in English – he would always recite it in our first language. I learned to read the Bible in English but when I think of Psalm 1, it's always in my home language.

This Psalm contrasts the life of a faithful person with the life of a faithless person. According to Psalm 1, people who obey God's will are blessed. They are like healthy, fruit bearing trees planted along a river-bank with strong roots – "Whatever they do prospers." In contrast, people who fail to obey God have meaningless lives that blow away like dust.

Our Gospel reading is Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes, also recorded in Matthew 5 – 7, but unlike Matthew, Luke lists "Woes" as well as blessings. Luke says, "Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, weep and are marginalized," and "Woe to you who are rich, full and of whom people say good things." Luke makes it clear that God is on the side of the poor and the marginalized and he condemns those who seek fulfilment through riches, wealth and comfort at the expense of eternal life.

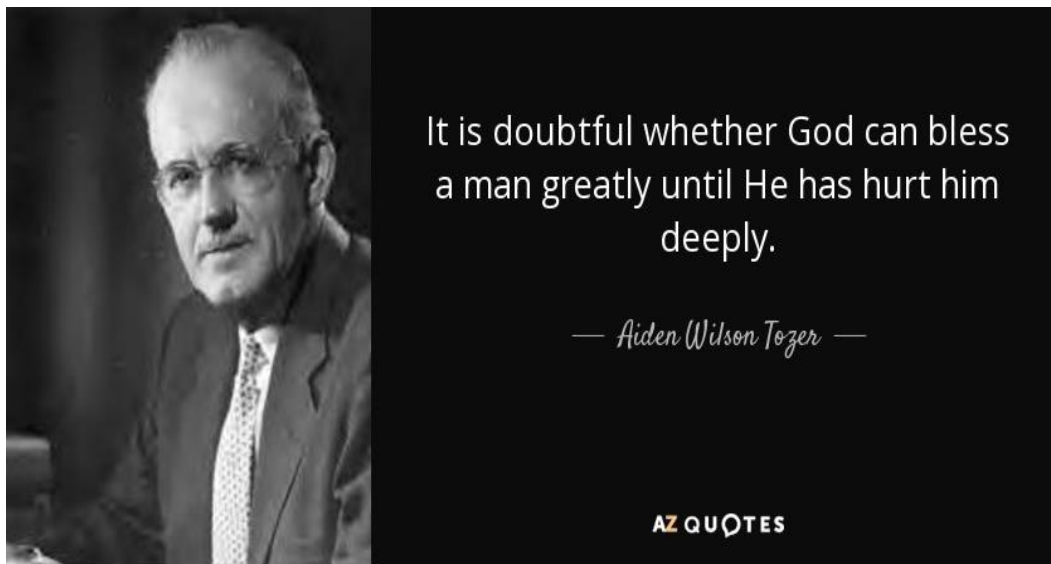
Do you not wish that life is a matter of 'do good and you are blessed' versus 'do evil and you are punished'? Life will surely be a lot more simple and I'm certain that everyone will follow God because as human beings we all want only good things to happen to us. But life is a very complex matter. There is mystery in suffering and we don't always understand why people suffer. A funny saying goes, "It rains on both the just and the unjust, but it rains even more on the just because the unjust have stolen the umbrella of the just."

Both passages today contain some of the difficult to understand words in the Bible. I am sure we know that we cannot just take them at face value – literally. It may give us some comfort to know that we are not alone, many of the saints before us also struggled.

Saint Teresa of Avila had some tough experiences that made her challenge Jesus. Legend has it that she was on her way to found another monastery when suddenly she fell from her horse into the muddy ground. Now, being the Spaniard that she was, she had a quick temper, and exclaimed: "Oh my Lord! When will you cease scattering obstacles in our path!" To which the Lord replied: "Do not complain, daughter. This is how I treat my friends." Her response was one of extreme familiarity, "If this is how you treat your friends, it is no wonder you have so few!" ([Life of Saint Teresa](#))



A W Tozer, also has this to say about the way God works ...

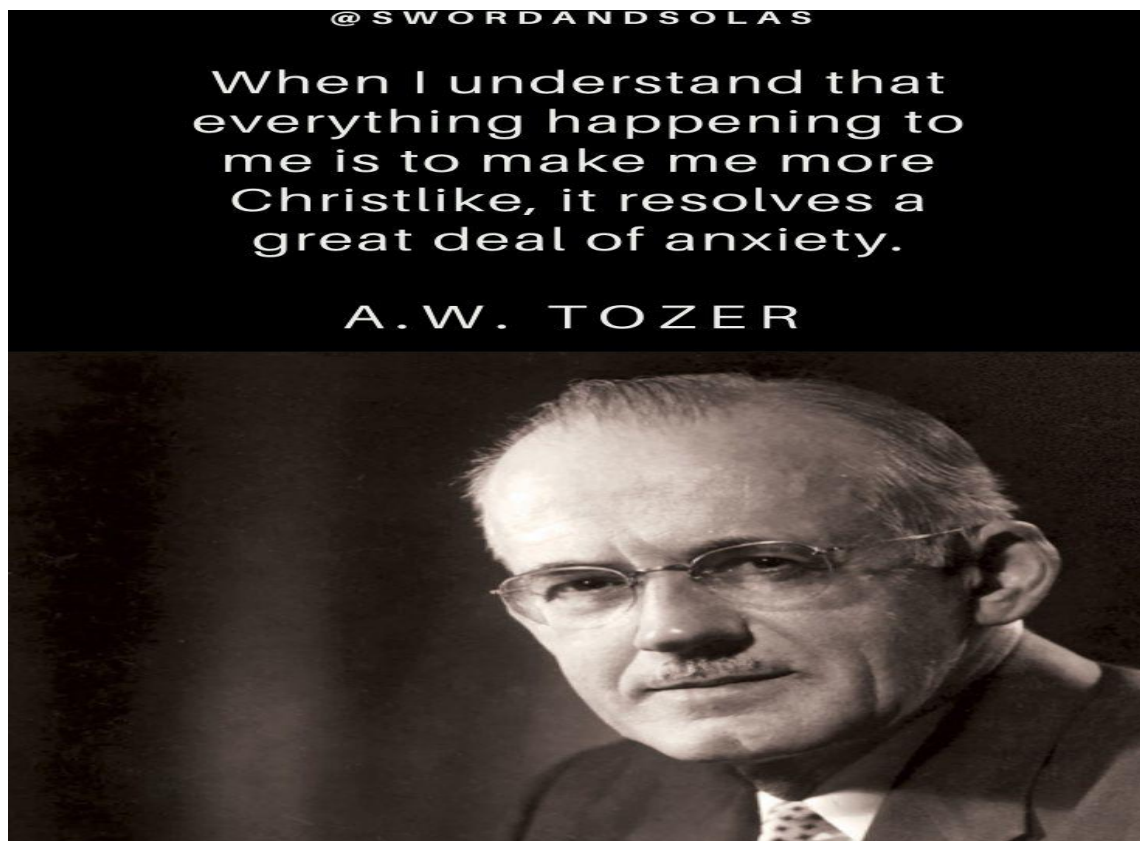


Psalm 1 and Luke 6:17-26 are sobering, yet, they are infused with a wonderful hope for the followers of Jesus. God does not issue warnings like these woes to scare us or to make us feel insecure in his love. The writer of Psalm 1 and Jesus in the Beatitudes used paradoxes to show us how in God's kingdom the common rules of life don't apply. These paradoxes show that the values of the world are different to the values of the kingdom. Romans 4:17 says, "The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

I believe God says these words to invite us into deeper and better ways of living. These words show us that the world is not a pleasure park, rather it is a tough training school designed to mould and remake us for our future destiny in God's kingdom. Jesus identified those who are suffering in his society and said they were blessed. He identified those who were enjoying security and privilege and said, "Woe to you." I wonder, what forms of suffering, marginalization, injustice Jesus would

identify in the world today. These are words of hope given to help us reflect on whether or not we are focused on doing God's will as we seek his kingdom. The way to enter the kingdom is simple – we just have to do the will of the Father. And what is the will of the Father? The will of the Father, says Jesus in Matthew 22:37-40, is to love God with all our hearts, all our souls and all our minds and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

I will close with the words of A W Tozer ..



Let us pray – Father God, we pray that you prune our priorities, refine our characters, realign our desires and shape our lives so that we more clearly resemble our Lord Jesus Christ and more sincerely live for his kingdom. Amen

**Dolapo Ogunbawo**