Sermon:
**Blessed are you who are poor… who hunger now… who weep now… when men hate you because of S/M.
Woe to you who are rich… who are well fed… who laugh now… when all men speak well of you** (Lk6.20-26).

Jesus must have been very hard to live with, hard to listen to. We think of “gentle Jesus, meek and mild”, but that is not Jesus. **“Hate your father and mother”** (Lk 14.26), **“you must be perfect”** (Mt 5.48), **“I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”** (Mt 10.34).

TEXT is stark and uncomfortable, too uncomfortable not to be Jesus’ words. Jesus believed in the coming Kingdom with its apocalyptical reversals – correcting the ills of society.

Over the years we have lost the sharpness and intensity of this Jesus, in order to live with him.

How have we done this?

[1] Taking the words too literally

You could take Jesus’ words to heart, take them literally and end up authoritarian, legalistic & oppressive.

Few will go this way. Given TEXT, a wooden literalism leads to nonsense. Are poor or hungry atheists, terrorists, extreme racists blessed? Does *anyone* who cries have God’s favour? Should you stir up hatred?

Are the rich, the well-fed, those who laugh, and nice people all destined for woes?

[2] Explaining the words away

Saying Jesus said them to make an impact, that he did not really mean them, that they show a typically Semitic exaggeration, especially the second lot (cf Hate your father…). God is not like this…

[3] Spiritualising the words

*“The meaning is, of course, given in Mt’s Gospel: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit.’  It is this poverty of spirit of which Jesus is speaking. What God wants from us is our recognition that we are spiritually poor.”*

This is not what Luke records. We should not ‘spiritualise’ the words to take away their impact.

We do all this because Jesus’ words are hard to swallow. We are rich, full and laugh; we aim to be thought well of in our community. We are on the wrong side of the blessings. Rather than twist Jesus to suit, take in the pain, feel the horror of a life lived all wrong, then throw yourselves on God’s mercy and love, to be directed anew by Jesus, which *might* mean, for example, as for the rich young ruler, renunciation of riches.