

Thought For The Day Advent 7th December



Genesis 49: 1 - 28

Then Jacob called his sons, and said: 'Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

2 Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father.

3 'Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the first fruits of my vigour, excelling in rank and excelling in power.

4 Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel because you went up on to your father's bed; then you defiled it—you went up on to my couch!

5 'Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords.

6 May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company—for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstringed oxen.

7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel!

I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

8 'Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you.

9 Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness—who dares rouse him up?

10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between

his feet,

until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his.

11 Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes;

12 his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

13 'Zebulun shall settle at the shore of the sea; he shall be a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon.

14 'Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds;

15 he saw that a resting-place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to the burden, and became a slave at forced labour.

16 'Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel.

17 Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backwards.

18 'I wait for your salvation, O LORD.

19 'Gad shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels.

20 'Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall provide royal delicacies.

21 'Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears lovely fawns.

22 'Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall.

23 The archers fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard.

24 Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,

25 by the God of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

26 The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.

27 'Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil.'

28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing.

Thought:

It says in the book of Genesis that just before he died, Jacob blessed his sons, 'blessing each one with a suitable blessing.'

We may wonder whether the sons themselves received these words as a blessing. Some of the pronouncements and prophecies Jacob uttered are rather harsh.

No doubt, Jacob's sons will have had their own views on Jacob's capabilities as a father. He had children by four women; two of them were wives and sisters to each other and two of them were servants. The children grew up in an atmosphere of intense jealousy in which Jacob openly had favourites among his sons. So, it is hardly surprising that some of them grew up with 'issues'.

But then again, Jacob's childhood was no walk in the park. He had to flee his home because of his rivalry with his brother and his relationship with his father-in-law was pretty tense at times.

I wonder if Jacob's sons had insight into the struggles he had and forgave him for his shortcomings as a father? I wonder if they felt their father loved them despite the frankness with which he detailed their faults? I wonder if they were able to be better fathers to their children than their father was to them?

Advent is a time for wondering what God is doing in the world and being open to it.

As we get older, we become more inclined to think about this in terms of what

God will do in the world in which the generations that come after us will live. What does God have in store for our children and grandchildren and great grandchildren? What will become of them? Have we equipped them for what they will have to face? What can we still do in the time we have left with them to get them ready for the rest of their lives?

Some people slip into self-pity at this point in the conversation. They remain angry with their parents for the way they brought them up. They continue to be disappointed in their children who didn't turn out quite how they hoped. These are tensions that can come to the fore at Christmas time. Imagine Christmas in Jacob's tent with the four mothers of his children and the sons all sat around listening to their father go through what was wrong with each of them!

None of us wants a Christmas like that. So, what we need at Christmas is love based on the understanding that comes from repentance and forgiveness. We have not been the parents we should have been and we have not been the children we should have been either, but here we are. God loves us so we should love one another. And God still has more things to show us and even more things to show to the generations who will come after us.

Can we, therefore, despite the mistakes that we have made in the past, and the mistakes that others have made that have caused us to suffer; can we forgive each other and love each other and show the young ones how you do that? Because this is the skill that will give them the strength they need to face whatever is coming next.

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