

Lent Devotional March 23, 2020

Scripture

Genesis 49:1-28

1 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 vigor, excelling in rank and excelling in power. 4 Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel because you went up onto your father's bed; then you defiled it - you went up onto 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 hamstrung 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 scepter 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 labor. 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 which bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backward. 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.

Devotional

The Rev. Dr. Carol B. Pitts '89, Specialized Ministry (2011)

Blessings? Yikes, Jacob! You call all of these blessings? Yes, they certainly are for Judah, Zebulun, and Joseph. But calling your son Reuben unstable, calling Simeon and Levi violent, and calling Benjamin a ravenous wolf? Really? These sound like insults, not blessings. Aren't all these men your children? Don't you love them all? What do you think your words will do to them and to their relationships with each other?

Children long for their parents' blessings. Even adult children—consciously or unconsciously—often yearn for parental approval. Likewise, whether we want to admit it or not, many of us yearn for God's approval. Sometimes we feel like we'll never get it. And sometimes we assume we stand with Judah and Joseph and are blessed.

If I were a child of Jacob, what would he call me? Would Jacob bless me, or insult me? Before I criticize Jacob too much, or before I get too angry at him . . . have I always blessed the children I love? Have I insulted them? Have I at times exercised poor judgment and shown favoritism?

One of the beauties of Scripture is that in it we meet characters who reflect the best and the worst in us. No one is perfect. And that means there is room for me.

Prayer

God of the blessed and the cursed, God of those who bestow kindness and those who do not, grant me good judgment that I may bless and not insult, that I may be compassionate and not hurtful. Amen.