



Blessing or Sorrow?

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Rachel was having a difficult labor. She was about to give birth to her second child for whom she had begged and pleaded with God. As she felt death near her, Rachel named her son, *Benoni*, meaning – son of my sorrow. When Jacob received the news of Rachel’s death he wept, yet as he looked at his newborn child Jacob saw blessing and named him *Benjamin*, meaning – child of blessing (of the right hand).

It was the custom of the time that parents named their children according to their experiences of the birth and the child. Sarah laughed when she conceived at the age of 90 so she named her son Isaac, meaning *he laughs*. Jacob grabbed the heel of his twin brother Esau, hence was named *the one who takes by the heel*.

We understand why Rachel named her son Benoni. She was in labor pains, dying. We also understand why Jacob who held the newborn saw *blessing*.

Stretching the story a bit I reflect on “perception.” I am intrigued that we humans can live through the same experience, the same moment, the same encounter, yet name them differently.

Perception is as unique to individuals as our fingerprints. Perhaps this explains why nothing seems to be absolute truth, or lie, and why there are many realities, many versions of what appears to be obvious; why one’s Benoni is another’s Benjamin, why one’s war is another’s justice, one’s despair another’s hope. No wonder misunderstandings and disagreements abound!

I wonder if in our deeply divided world we will ever understand one another. Since each of us perceives the world through our very own set of eyes, I wonder if we will ever find harmony or peace.

What concerns me about perception is that our perceptions eventually become our realities, our stories, the narratives in our heads that repeat whether factually true or not. Our perceptions become our truths. And that’s dangerous because at any given time any story has many sides, each with legitimate perspectives often colliding with one another. In that setting can we remember that ours is but one perspective and that there are many others?

I wonder if during these sorrowful times of COVID and division we could listen to one another, we could see the blessing in the sorrow, the opportunity in the trauma, the learning in the disagreement. I wonder if we can turn the sorrow into blessing, and by doing so write the story differently.

It seems perception depends on many attributes - attitude, interest, life experience, ethnicity, gender, skin color, class, age, culture, and more, as well as where we stand, our place in the world.

This does not mean that we are prisoners of our own external circumstances and inner attitude. Perception can be changed as we change our glasses, the lenses through which we look at the world.

As a people of faith, our quest is to put on the lens of Benjamin instead of Benoni, blessing instead of sorrow. For, our faith story is one of hope no matter how deep the despair, one of resurrection no matter how dim the valley of death. By renaming the experience we can turn it around, and as a result change the gloomy story of our world into a story of life-giving blessing for ALL just as God intended it.

Don’t forget to vote. And continue to wear your mask.