

One of my grandfathers died 6 years before I was born, my first name John comes from him; the other grandfather died when I was 7. Because we lived quite a distance from Dunedin we didn't see him all that often but 3 memories stand out:

1. The day my three living grandparents – Nana, Poppa and Grandma came to visit us by train in South Canterbury.
2. Nana and Poppa gave me a green dressing gown when I was around 4 or 5.
3. I remember walking across Highgate with Poppa to the local dairy when I was 5 or 6 so he could buy us an ice-cream – I can still see that ice-cream in my hand – it must have been Tip Top it was so good, but it couldn't be in 1955 in Dunedin? It may have been Newjoy or Royal; Reale or Crystal?

The reason I share this with you is my memories of Poppa are of good gifts and being with us. You will have your memories too of grandparents and good times. Although grandparent memories for you may be non-existent or somewhat lacking in warmth.

In the context of teaching about praying Jesus said:

Matthew 7:11

If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

I: 'If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children.....'

This verse assumes two things - that we are capable of evil and capable of good. We know this intuitively – we can be downright niggardly and nasty and yet we have within us the potential for goodness and dare I say greatness.

I came across this recently in an article written by a minister who had like today had conducted a dedication ceremony. He spoke to the congregation about the dysfunctional relationship between the Old Testament brothers Esau and Jacob under the heading 'family fights.'

After the service a woman unknown to the minister strode purposefully up to him and declared, 'That sermon was just for me! I haven't spoken to my brother in years. He swindled me out of our inheritance. But I'm going right home to phone him and I'm going to say, 'You're a liar, and a drunk and a cheat. But you're my brother and I love you!'

Wow, the minister thought! Someone actually listened, somebody heard! He was feeling pretty good at that point. But the woman hadn't finished: 'Then I'm going to say, 'and this is the last phone call you're ever going to get from me.'

Which for some reason or no reason, probably to do with my maternally inherited random mind, I thought of my mother's line, mostly spoken I jest, I hope... 'If I never see them again it'll be too soon!'

Jesus is right – we are flawed, we are marked – and it comes out differently in each of us. Yet at the same time we have this ability to give good gifts.

For me, Genesis 1-3 contains utterly profound spiritual truth. As Julian reminded us last week we are formed in God's image and as we read on into chapters 2-3 we find, to put it bluntly, we have this capacity to stuff up. The rest of the Bible is pretty much about how this works out in practice and what God has done about it.

The early Christian leader Paul understood this more than most. He wrote to the church at Rome about his ability to get it wrong. Eugene Peterson gets to the heart of it in his translation of Romans 7:

'It happens so regularly that it's predictable. The moment I decide to do good, sin is there to trip me up. I truly delight in God's commands, but it's pretty obvious that not all of me joins in that delight. Parts of me covertly rebel, and just when I least expect it, they take charge.

I've tried everything and nothing helps. I'm at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn't that the real question?

The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does. He acted to set things right in this life of contradictions where I want to serve God with all my heart and mind, but am pulled by the influence of sin to do something totally different.'

He's right, God took the initiative and Jesus can and does. I was checking out with Ella, our oldest granddaughter, the other night, to see how she'd gone that day in terms of the seven sins (sometimes called the seven deadly sins). Not a good idea because all I could remember were the sins of gluttony (projecting a bit) and avarice which I later found out was greed. Oh dear 'though you are evil.' Well she passed the test I think, no evidence of greed other than a desire to have the latest I Phone – so she'd had a good day in terms of evil. The others by the way are lust, pride in its various shapes and forms, despair, anger and sloth. How have you gone this week?

I thought it would be helpful to have a discussion about this because we have to be true to who are! Having recognised our capacity for being less than we can be and more than we could ever dream or imagine we could be what are some of the good gifts, fathers and by implication mothers, can give to their children.

Let's listen to Paul Simon singing Father and daughter to help us

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UY_BMqcgJDY

What are the gifts that Jamie and Sian can give to Celia Anne?

There are some things I have observed along the way since that amazing night our first daughter was born at 10:44 in the evening of June 12, 1975; an experience repeated around 2:00 in the afternoon on 16 September 1979.

1. In 1953 in the book 'Where Main Street Meets the River,' Hodding Carter who was a prominent newspaper editor wrote: **'A wise woman once said to me that there are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these she said is roots, the other, wings. And they can only be grown, these roots and these wings, in the home. We want our children's roots to go deep into the soil beneath them and into the past, not in arrogance but in confidence.**

Some years later Jean Wade Rindlaub, speaking at an American Mothers' Committee Meeting expanded on this: 'There are only two bequests we can leave our children. Roots and wings; roots in such things as the true deep faith which has stood our ancestors in such good stead through the generations; roots which will guide our children in choosing between the true and the false, the just and the unjust. And wings that will teach a child how to soar into wider and still wider worlds of understanding.'

2. Unconditional love, acceptance and forgiveness
3. Boundaries in which to grow
4. Developing their strengths and gifts by providing them with opportunities. To illustrate – currently Jamie is his older daughters’ football coach. One is pretty keen; the other after the first game said, ‘Mummy I don’t want to play football, I want to be a princess with fairy wings.’ To which her mother wisely replied, ‘yes but even a princess has to be fit.’ Two weeks ago I would have given her player of the day for the most forward rolls during a game – she’s obviously been watching far too many players diving in Premier League Football.
5. For Celia the special gifts Jamie and Sian can give is to keep reminding her and her sisters that they are capable, beautiful and intelligent – because if they don’t hear these things at home they’ll go looking other places and may not be treated with the same carefulness. For those with sons the gifts you give your sons are different – your sons need to know who’s in charge, what the rules are and will they be administered fairly – which of course was the point Warren Gatland laboured before the first Test last night.

‘...how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him?’

So then I got to think about the good gifts God bestows on his children. I also got to think, well is it any different?

1. God gives us roots and wings – the roots are found in Genesis 1: **‘Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.... So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.** Formed in God’s image, male and female, with a huge task – to explore and discover all that’s part.
2. Unconditional love acceptance and forgiveness
3. Boundaries
4. Gifts and strengths
5. Reminders of who God says we are

But wait there’s more:

This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life. God didn’t go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger, telling the world how bad it was. He came to help, to put the world right again.

John 3:16-17 – Eugen Peterson’s translation