



The birth of a new province is a rare event, one that many Archbishops of Canterbury will never have attended, and like all rare and precious events, like even normal but precious events like the birth of a child, it is a new beginning which raises questions and hopes together. As we move to this new beginning we must especially thank His Grace Archbishop the Most Reverend Doctor Daniel Deng. He is the midwife of this Province, who has encouraged and strengthened it to the point we have now reached. Your Grace, we appreciate your work and your love for what is now a Province, your wisdom in its birth.

To be invited to preach here this morning is a privilege of which I could never have dreamed, your Grace Archbishop Ezekiel Kondo Kumar Kuku. I thank you and the province of the Sudan as it begins its life for the honour of being here at your birth. Like all new births it comes with responsibility within Sudan for Christians to make it work, and from outside to support, to pray, to love this new Province.

But what will happen? How will this new arrival survive and grow and develop? It is a birth in which the Church is already adult even at its beginning as a province, with a history and a background, a context of joy and of sorrow like all churches. We would be unusual people if we did not find that our hopes were accompanied by fears, our expectations by worries. If we look 10 years, 20 years, even 100 years from now, what then will this province be? Think how it has changed since the first Cathedral was built here over 100 years ago.

There is much to develop, many opportunities and many challenges. There is land and there are churches, above all there is a wonderful people. The Province must learn to be sustainable financially, to develop the skills of its people, and to bless this country, as the Christians here already do.

But the full answer is only in the mind of God. The mind of God is the mind of a God who in Jesus Christ reveals to us his generosity, his capacity to equip us for every need, his power that is greater than not only our weakness and our foolishness, but also than all that any human being could do to us, in any province in the world. Most of all the mind of God is revealed to us supremely, completely and utterly in the birth, the life, the death, the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ, and in his sending of the Holy Spirit. The apostle John sums up the mind of God by saying, "God is Love" (1 John 4:8).

So at the beginning of the journey of this province, we know one thing for certain that God is Love and being Love he is sufficient, and being sufficient and loving, the experience of the life of this province will reflect love and sufficiency from God.

It is in that context that we look at these readings that we have heard today, and we see there unfolded all the love and resources of God which call us to a future that is greater than we can imagine, to a future extending not only through this life but into eternity as part of the coming kingdom of God, an eternity of light without tears, of hope without fear, of love without limit, of joy which can never be excessive, of order without constraint, of life in all the abundance of the grace of God.

Let us begin with Jacob because there we find a man caught up in his own fears and weaknesses, who makes a wise decision. His wise decision is to know and confess his own foolishness, much later in his life. We can never be wiser than when we say to God, "I am not wise and I need your wisdom."

We are wise when we admit that within us, whether as individuals, as a parish, as a diocese, as a province or as the Church throughout the world, there are the seeds of weakness and of foolishness, of unfaithfulness to God. Again, the apostle John says, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

So in Jacob we see someone who knows what it is to fail, and knows that the task before him is too great, yet trusts God. Your Grace, other your graces here today, my Lord Bishops, pastors of the Church, distinguished guests (and speaking to myself as well), the task before us is too great for us. The task is to be the people of God and that task is not possible unless God empowers it.

In the Old Testament, wisdom is the gift and the capacity to live well in different circumstances, to make good decisions that in all the different contexts of life mean that we do not turn away from God in any way.

Above all, wisdom tells us how to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God, God who came to us in fully human form, yet fully God.

To put it in simplest terms, wisdom is the gift of God that calls us to Godliness of character in the whole of life. For what is there, in being a church, if we are not filled with a Godly character? What is there in holding any position in the Church, whether a pastor, a bishop or an archbishop, a primate if we lose the Godly character what means we may stand before Christ at the end of time knowing that with all our sinfulness, we have sought to follow him?

So pray for wisdom, a wisdom Jacob learned through hard experience And that takes us on to St Paul and this wonderful, beautiful, glorious passage from the letter to the Romans.

With that prayer driven wisdom we have God's promise that we are called to allow God to work with us even in the darkest moments. You know what darkness is like, as do so many Christians in the world. The IDPs and refugees whom we saw in Kadugli yesterday know darkness. Yet the Spirit guides us to pray, knowing that God works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purposes.

For if God is with us, who can be against us? I do not underestimate what a challenge this is in all parts of the world. For the threats and darkness of this world often seem greater than the hope that we do not see that lies in the future with Christ.

Yet that verse, Romans 8:28, is another of those immeasurably precious verses to us in our family. After a car crash in 1983, when our daughter was dying, God spoke so clearly to us in that verse, and we have found it to be utterly true even at her death, a sorrow many here will know. It is true beyond all truth, that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes. It is not true simply that everything works out well, you know better than I do that that is not true, but it is true that God works in all things for the good of those who love him, that the depths of evil that attack us are somehow overcome and God shows himself greater.

So secondly, I say to you, do not fear! Pray for wisdom, and do not fear. Know that if we your guests love you, with all weakness and frailty (and we do) that God's love is infinitely greater. Responding to his love you are called to be a Church of grace. In practise, that means that when some of you fail, when people fall and slip, you do not turn away from them but reach out to them with the grace of God.

And that indeed takes us to the third passage, our Gospel passage. Indeed, this is a new province, and it is beginning, but it will grow as it holds to the promises of Romans and to wisdom. Let us think back to the people who brought the Gospel to the Sudan, who started with a small seed, but now with the Lord in heaven and all the angels celebrate a new province in the Anglican Communion. The Episcopal Church in the Sudan is a church that was born amid sacrifice and like so many around the world, including our own country, continues the work and task of the mission of God.

Being a province is not just about being independent. That is important, the structure of the Anglican Communion has no central authority, it is not in any sense imperial or colonial. Provinces are inter-dependant, they rely on one another for love and prayer and support in many ways, but they are autonomous, they are their own thing in their own culture and that is something I celebrate with great joy.

The heart of the Episcopal Church is the diocese and within it, the parishes, the archdeaconries, the cathedrals, the chaplaincies, all called to be the servants of their communities, to be those who do good.

No government need fear this province, for the more liberty it has, the more it will seek to bless its society, the more it will give. That is true the world over.

But we are also inter-dependant. Interdependence means that we live in love, connected to each other and seeking to help and support each other in every possible way. We seek the blessing of fellowship and the liberty of autonomy, to be held together by the gifts of the Spirit. The Cross of Nails on your altar, set in stone from a bombed Cathedral at Coventry in England, reminds us that we belong to one another. It is a symbol of our common seeking for reconciliation.

Also, the Church remains missionary, and as you begin life as a province, you remain as you always have been, those who serve the God who, as the gospel reading says, fishes. Of course, we are so close to the Nile that fishing is no stranger to you, on the contrary, you know all about it. The reading we have speaks to us of the God who fishes and catches so much, and like all fishers, sorts out the catch in judgement. We live as the people of God, constant of the judgement of God, and that is a doctrine that we share with Islam, that at the end of time, we will face the judgement of God, and it is living in fear and respect for that judgement that calls us to the salvation of Jesus Christ.

We have to hold these three passages together. When we speak of judgement, we also hold on to the good purposes of God. When we speak of the task before us, we reach for wisdom, but we are never complacent, we are always hungry for more of God.

May God bless this country of the Sudan, and may God bless the Episcopal Province of the Sudan and may the blessing of God be seen in the lavish abundance of life, of grace and generosity, of wisdom and hope from now until the end of ages, so that God's name may be praised, the glory of Christ proclaimed and the people of this world given light amidst the darkness of the world in which we live.

9 min read

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