

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, March 25, 2021

Stepping Off the Ark

Then God said to Noah, "Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you—the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it." So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his son's wives. —Genesis 8:15-18

In a recent reading of Genesis, I was blessed to recount the voyage of Noah. The account of Noah has taken on greater meaning in our day as we have been able to sympathize with the confinement of that journey! As we reach the anniversary of this COVID shutdown, we find more that we have in common with Noah. By my foggy recollections and records, the shutdown began just over a year ago as our first cancelled worship service was March 22, 2020. The shutdown order was probably a few days before that. As of this week our time battling COVID has been as long as Noah's stint in the ark. We are quick to speak of Noah's forty days and nights of rain, but slower to remember that the whole time in the ark was just over a year. Comparing Genesis 7:11 and 8:14 it appears that they spent a year and a week in the boat. The full chronology of Noah's experience is a little tricky to nail down. He spent forty days in the rain, and the flood waters remained at full strength for about half a year. It was around this time that the ark came to rest on Mount Ararat (and I do hope that it rested in a level position!), but it was another half a year before the waters would sufficiently recede, and the land dry enough that the chosen family could leave. His journey was taken in a number of phases, just as the pandemic has put us through several seasons, from lockdown, to limited lockdown and back again.

Genesis also tells us of Noah's great care in making sure that all was safe outside. He sent out a raven and a dove (twice) to be sure that all was well. The waters may have receded, but he did not want to step into a sea of mud. His caution was most reasonable, and again we can relate to this great savior of old. The vaccine goes forth, the numbers decrease, but when are we *really* safe to step out of our confinement? When can we shed the masks, or get up close, sing as a congregation, or join in larger gatherings? One thing we know for sure is that all the experts will never agree, so we will be burdened with the responsibility of weighing the evidence and making our

own decisions. Now is a time to pray to our God and Noah's God for wisdom and courage as we decide when and how to step out of the ark.

Noah and his family then faced a time of restarting and rebuilding. The earth had been devastated and all remnants of the past had been washed away so they had their work cut out for them. We are thinking more in terms of back to normal, but the situation is not quite as simple as all that. We too have all suffered losses over the past year, some minor and some devastating, and there may be a need for restoration. A major concern of mine is the inertia which sets in over such a lengthy shutdown. We may complain of being cooped up at home, but when we are free to go, we may also be surprised at the kick-start we need to get back in gear! This is a time to consider some new endeavors. We are told that Noah planted a vineyard which bore much fruit. Also take note that Noah's vineyard venture did not end well, but we can still be inspired by his initiative in starting this new project.

Through all the trauma and uncertainty Noah did continue on with a joyful hope. In the popular retelling of Noah's journey, we overlook the strain of it all, but rightly we remember the joy and assurance of a blessed future that was claimed by Noah. In art and drama, we see inspiring portrayals of the animals leaving the ark and spreading out across the landscape. We see the altar of gratitude which was built to honor God. We delight in the promise of God—*As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease* (8:22), and last but not least, we rejoice in the bright and colorful rainbow of promise (8:12-16). These blessings and promises of God sustained Noah and his family. Troubles were many in those pioneering days, but they were also surrounded by signs of hope which called them to be joyful. May we learn from Noah a lesson in hope and find a little guidance as we step out of the ark.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

Dear God, it is so hard for us not to be anxious. We worry about work and money, about food and health, about weather and crops, about war and politics, about loving and being loved. Show us how perfect love casts our fear. —Monica Furlong