
Sunday 3rd May 2020 – Easter 4

Readings: Genesis 7 & John 10:1-10

Genesis 7

The Lord then said to Noah, 'Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.'

And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him.

Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month – on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. And rain fell on the earth for forty days and forty nights.

On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the Lord shut him in.

For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. Every living thing that moved on land perished – birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and

animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

John 10:1-10

‘Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger’s voice.’ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, ‘Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Reflection

I don't know which Bible passages you have memorised, but one of the first verses I committed to memory after becoming a Christian was John 10:10, well technically John 10:10b "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full". As a new believer I was encouraged to consider, not just what knowing Jesus meant for my eternal destiny, but what it meant for my life, how it would affect each day and the way I lived it. This approach has changed the course of my life and I do not regret it, I know that so far, I have lived a fuller and richer life following Jesus than I would have done following my own plans or the paths the world was leading me on.

However, in these times of virus and lockdown it is easy for our attention to be drawn to the thief, who comes to kill and destroy. After all that is what the virus has done, with people's lives, their livelihoods, their lifestyles and relationships. But I am struck that Jesus knew about the thieves when he spoke to the Pharisees that day, since sin entered the world there have always been 'thieves' that have stopped people living the lives that God created them to.

In our current situation the Lord brought my attention in a new way to think about what it must have been like for Noah, as the door of the ark was closed, as he was locked in, and the rains began to fall and the floods come up. I have in the past considered Noah's trust in the Lord and in his faithfulness, after all it is this trust that marks Noah out among the peoples of the Earth, but how was Noah's faith tested as the rain came down and the floods rose. What were his reflections about the goings on outside? What did he think that life would be like after the flood?

As we know (Genesis 9), after the flood the Lord made a covenant with Noah and all humanity that never again would he send a flood that would wipe out all life on the earth. The sign of this covenant was the rainbow, a symbol of hope used in so many different situations, and most recently during the Covid-19 lockdown. The rainbow reminds us of God's faithfulness even in the darkest storm, that no matter what thief comes to kill and destroy nothing can overpower the grace and love of God.

As we continue to live in lockdown, reflecting on what is going on outside and praying for the world around us, as we contemplate what life might be like afterward, we remember the rainbow, God's ancient symbol, the sign of his promise to Noah. And that the fulfilment of that promise was why Jesus came and it is why he died and rose again, to set his people free, to give them life, to win the final victory over the thief, and we need Jesus as much today, in lockdown and isolation, faced with uncertainty and fear, as we ever have. Come Holy Spirit that we might live this life to the full!

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