

Dear Friends

Last time I wrote for the Parish Magazine I drew parallels between the release of lockdown and Noah's family coming out of the ark. It feels like it's been a long and unsettling summer and this sense of release has, like for Noah and his family, perhaps opened up other pressures and uncertainties. Some of us feel we are still locked in the ark, others have left the ark but are now struggling with how to settle. Some of us have managed to travel, but become stuck elsewhere or quarantined when we return. Still others perhaps find the strange new world, into which we have been semi-released, difficult and perhaps we even long for a return to lockdown when things were simpler. For some, the world we now face with its anxieties about economy, finance, R-rates, local lockdowns, face masks, and so on, is almost as scary as the world we were released from. I'm sure it was similar for Noah and his family.

However, lockdown has given us time and space to take stock of what is important in our lives. Like an enforced retreat, our lockdown experience holds up a mirror to our lives and makes us take notice. I've said it before, how we leave lockdown – even if that leaving is bumpy and at times circuitous – is important. Do we just go back to the way things were, or do we live differently after this chance to reflect?

If you follow on from the Noah story in the Bible, you will discover a truly sad fact: the humanity which survived the flood returned to their old ways really quickly. No sooner have Noah's feet touched the ground, it seems that they've started to place humanity at the centre of everything again. Noah gets drunk and one of his sons gets cursed. Then there's some ancestry where God doesn't get a look in, but instead humans are placed front and centre again. Then we build up towards the arrogance of humanity being manifest in the great tower of Babel. God reappears in the story, but this time as an onlooker from outside - so far has humanity drifted away from the God who saved them and their ancestors from global judgment. And so the cycle repeats. Humanity won't listen to God or each other and so becomes divided and scattered across the very world they were created to populate and enjoy together.

It is a sad tale. For us though, it raises questions. What will change for us as we come out of lockdown? Will life be as before? When the mirror was held up, were we happy with what we saw? What was important then that isn't so important now? What did we pass over then that we came to learn was really important to us now? What have we learned about God in lockdown that we need to not lose now?

The temptation will always be to slide back into old habits. To return to ways of living that we didn't miss when they were removed which we realised weren't that important after all. We need to pray that we would not slide back into being the centrepiece of our lives, and instead remember what is important to us. Perhaps lockdown gave you chance to spend more time with God – why let anything crowd that out! Perhaps lockdown reminded you about the importance of family and friends – why let other stuff get in the way of that?

Jesus tells a parable about seed falling in thorny ground where the stuff of the world chokes the seedlings. For us, lockdown has removed a lot of the weeds that choke us. Let's prayerfully make sure they don't grow again, unbidden, as we emerge back into the world.

Steve