

Dear Friends

As lockdown eases, many have voiced their concerns and anxieties about how we come out of lockdown, how we know it is the right time, and what life will look.

I write this in June, necessarily, because of editorial timescales, but as it stands there is a phased approach which is flexible depending on the mystical 'R' number (the reproduction number based on the average people infected by each infectious person). All this is complicated, and a really difficult judgement call for those in power.

With all this going on you can imagine how I sat up suddenly when reading in Genesis 8 the other day with my kids, a passage which describes how Noah came out of his flood lockdown. The flood started in the second month and it rained for 40 days solid complete with springs bursting from subterranean stores, and the water covered the earth for 150 days – that's 5 months stuck in a boat with only Noah's family and a load of pet animals for company!

In the seventh month, the boat rested on the mountains but the tops of many of these remained covered for another three months (until the tenth month – that's 8 months of lockdown). Noah waited another 40 days and then released a raven as he tentatively began to explore where breaking lockdown was possible. He sent out a dove as well, which returned without success. After waiting another week, the dove was released again and returned with an olive leaf - there were signs of life outside of lockdown! Still Noah waited another week before releasing the dove again, and this time it didn't return. Noah opened the door of the ark and saw dry ground; but even then, he didn't venture out.

Instead, after a full year of lockdown, stuck in a boat with his family and pets – and after being able to see the dry ground for quite a while but choosing not to venture out for whatever reason – Noah finally hears from God that they can leave the ark. The first thing he does after leaving the ark is to burn offerings in worship of God. I enjoyed reading the story in view of our own current experiences. I'd never thought about Noah's story like this before.

But what can we take from this story?

I suppose Noah was in charge as captain of the ship, and I wonder whether there were 'interesting' conversations about when to disembark, especially when it was obvious that dry land had appeared, trees were growing and the dove had finally jumped ship. You can imagine there might have been disagreements. There might have been talk of a phased approach (where they slept on board but spent time outside during the day). Maybe there were internal pressures too: cabin fever, a growing water shortage, food and bedding issues. There were probably concerns too about what this brave new world might be like – would it even be hospitable again?

For me, I wonder if we can take a couple of things away from it. Firstly, that whatever we think of the policies being put in place, we need to pray for our leaders. Noah needed to hear from God, and be led by God. For us, we want our leaders to be given the divine wisdom they need to navigate this situation, not for any political party reason, but just for the welfare and flourishing of our neighbours and ourselves. Let's commit to praying for them.

Secondly, Noah's first response to lockdown lifting was to worship God, building an altar and presenting burnt offerings upon it. What is our first response to each phase of lockdown easing? Noah probably had lots to worry about too (like keeping the snakes and lions 'socially distanced'), but first and foremost he acknowledged that if it wasn't for God, he'd have been a dead man.

Maybe this is our challenge: to embrace the gradual return to normality as a gift, praying for wisdom for our leaders, and thanking God for all that he has given us.

Steve