

## Service for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in May - 30<sup>th</sup> May 2021 - from Alun Vale Pastorate, North Wales

Hello and welcome to Alunvale which is a pastorate of three churches and a community centre involving both the United Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church of Wales. We are situated in Mold, Buckley & Ewloe Green in Flintshire, North Wales.

Last week like many others, we began tentatively to return to in-person worship as we call it these days.

It made me think of the family of Noah coming out of the Ark after all that time of confinement. In the musical *Children of Eden*, by Stephen Schwarz, Mrs Noah sings a wonderful song that begins – Oh look out there on the eastern sky is that a hint of light? and she sings of the joy of seeing the sun again ‘after all the nights we stood smelling rain and gopher wood’.

I also thought about the experience of the disciples at the end of Pentecost. A different kind of coming out.

So these accounts will be our focus for today.

It is of course also Trinity Sunday, so let us prepare for worship using the prayer from the URC prayer handbook for this year.

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We sing the hymn that many of us associate with this particular Sunday - Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.

**Hymn** - Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty

**Let us pray:**

God of love  
you create and recreate the world around us  
all that is  
all that grows  
all that breathes including us  
you show us in Jesus the Christ how we are to live  
and you move between us as Holy Spirit  
we rejoice to be your children in the places we have made our homes  
and praise and thank you

but we know we have colluded in the world's destruction  
we have followed other paths  
and broken the connections between us  
and we are truly sorry

help us to remember that even before these confessions have left our thoughts  
you have forgiven us and set us free to do better.

in real gratitude we pray as Jesus taught all his disciples

Our father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name;  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours  
now and forever.  
amen

Let's remind ourselves of the story of Noah and the ark in song

**Hymn** - The Lord said to Noah, There's gonna be a floody, floody

**Reading** - Genesis 8:15-19 & 9.9-17 (*The Message*)

15-17 God spoke to Noah: "Leave the ship, you and your wife and your sons and your sons' wives. And take all the animals with you, the whole menagerie of birds and mammals and crawling creatures, all that swarming extravagance of life, so they can reproduce and flourish on the Earth."

18-19 Noah disembarked with his sons and wife and his sons' wives. Then all the animals, crawling creatures, birds—every creature on the face of the Earth—left the ship family by family.

8-11 Then God spoke to Noah and his sons: "I'm setting up my covenant with you including your children who will come after you, along with everything alive around you—birds, farm animals, wild animals—that came out of the ship with you. I'm setting up my covenant with you that never again will everything living be destroyed by floodwaters; no, never again will a flood destroy the Earth."

12-16 God continued, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and everything living around you and everyone living after you. I'm putting my rainbow in the clouds, a sign of the covenant between me and the Earth. From now on, when I form a cloud over the Earth and the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll remember my covenant between me and you and everything living, that never again will floodwaters destroy all life. When the rainbow appears in the cloud, I'll see it and remember the eternal covenant between God and everything living, every last living creature on Earth."

17 And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I've set up between me and everything living on the Earth."

**Story** - Off the ark at last

Thank goodness! We're off the Ark at last!

It was exciting at first when God told Taid Noah he had to build the ark and collect all the animals . We all helped - even us kids - and once we were all on board we all had our jobs to do. Mine was to feed and clean the little animals like the hamsters and the rabbits, but I also liked to help feed the big animals like the elephants and the giraffes.

But after a while it began to get a bit boring and a bit smelly. And all the animals made such a noise! We couldn't go out on deck because the rain was so heavy and we just got soaked – so we were stuck indoors. Couldn't even watch the dolphins leaping or the whales spouting.

But then the rain stopped and we could go and play on deck and it was fun to see the birds flying out and we all watched to see if they would bring anything back with them when they came.

Then came the day when the dove didn't come back at all and we could see the land appearing as the waters went down. And then the rainbow! Wow - it was just so beautiful - I've never seen anything like it before and Taid said that it was God's promise that we would never have to do this again. I am so glad - once was enough!

Once we opened the doors some of the animals just dashed out and it was fun to watch them galloping around enjoying the space before they disappeared into the distance. Some of them needed to be carried out but they soon found their feet and scuttled away.

So now what? We are going to have to sow seeds to grow food because everything has been washed away and that will take time because it is so very very muddy. This is a new kind of adventure. I hope I see that rainbow again

### **Reading**

The rainbow was not the only sign of God's love for the world - as John tells us -

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, to that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3.16-17 *NRSV*)

And then came God's holy spirit like the wind in our next hymn

**Hymn** - The bright wind is blowing, the bright wind of heaven

### **Reading** - Acts 2.42-47 (*NIV*)

<sup>42</sup>They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. <sup>43</sup>Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup>All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup>They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup>Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and

ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

### **Story** - At the end of the day

Oh let me just sit down for a moment and catch my breath. What a day it's been – I don't know where to start.

We've been meeting together since Jesus left for the last time. We really did feel bereft. After the excitement of seeing him again it seemed a bitter pill to have a final farewell, at least in person. So we gathered together and reminded each other - told stories, broke bread and kept the faith.

It was as we were celebrating Pentecost that something happened – there was light, there was air moving around and there was hope. Peter said “We can't stay here we have to go out” so he did. In fact he burst out of the room and just started talking about Jesus and about what he meant to us.

Some were angry; some mocked, but lots of people listened and we all found ourselves talking and talking and more than that - finding ourselves able to communicate with people from all over.

As the day drew on we gathered into groups to tell our stories and we began to share our food with anyone who would sit round the table with us and they shared theirs. We told them about that last supper and what Jesus had told us to do when we broke bread together and everyone was full of joy. We gave thanks to God for our new version of a people sharing faith and food and help and hope.

And now as the sunlight fades, I have never been so exhausted but so exhilarated , so excited by the possibilities ahead. I don't even know what they all are but it will be good. It won't be easy, I admit that – I expect there will be opposition and our generosity can so easily be taken advantage of but if God is in this, if Jesus is with us I know it will be glorious. Exhausted I might be but I really don't think I can sleep just yet!

**Hymn** - The church is wherever God's people are praising

**Reflection** - What happens next?

So what happens next?

Well, we know what happened to Noah's family.

Whatever was going on in the rest of the - then unknown - world, Noah's family spread around the land and settled and created communities. We know because they are all - succeeding generations named - recorded in Genesis chapter 10.

We know what happened to the apostles too , because Luke has recorded their acts for us as they - joined by Paul - spread the good news of Jesus Christ around the world they knew. That news eventually reached our island and we are the recipients of generations of ministry and mission.

But what will happen to us?

The context we are emerging into is rather different from the one we retreated from 15 months ago. Some of us have just about managed to carry on with plenty to keep us occupied - too much at times. Some have struggled because they have lost people they love both to the Coronavirus and to other illnesses and disease; or because they have been unable to care for family and friends in the way they wanted to; or because they felt isolated and began to retreat. Some have learned new ways of connecting, using technology that was alien before all this began and some have quite surprised themselves. Pastoral care has continued and in some cases deepened as conversations became more intentional when it was not just the 'how are things' over coffee after worship. Human creativity has found so many new ways to get round the restrictions that were needed to protect us. There is so much that we should value from this strange time we have gone through.

But we have missed each other. Unlike Noah and his family or the - larger than we usually picture - group who secluded themselves between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost - we have not been able to look each other in the eye for so long, to hold hands, offer a touch of comfort. And we know we still have to hold back and take each return to 'normal' step by step, remembering to protect each other as best we can.

Hybrid church is the term that is now bandied about - church in person and on-line, keeping as many connected to each other in whatever ways suits best. It's going to be different.

It was no doubt different for Noah and his family, who would need to rebuild and plant, and I imagine they would have to wait for the sodden earth to dry before they could do all they needed to settle into their new lives in new places.

It was certainly different for the apostles as they first established their holy habits, without their guide and role model, in Jerusalem and then took this new way of communion life further afield.

Like them, there will be elements of our former life we will not want to lose - those holy habits and especially singing together when we can. But what of the new? - using the best of technology to make sure no-one need feel left out, holding on to the opportunities for serving our communities that have emerged during lockdown - addressing food poverty with meals and parcels and community fridges, supporting those who support us in the health service, shopping for neighbours. This future, which was not what we looked for, has the potential to be good - a blessed mixture of the traditional and familiar and the new and exciting. And let us not be afraid to take risks. The final song in *Children of Eden* is of the family leaving the ark, realising that their future is in God's hands, but also in theirs - "there is no journey gone so far, so far we cannot stop and change direction . . . we cannot know what will occur, just make our journey worth the taking and pray we're wiser than we were .".

Well that is how I see the future of church. My own future is a similar mixture of the prepared and the unknown as I leave stipendiary ministry at the end of July and wait for God to reveal the path for the next stage of my life's ministry.

We are inheritors of a tradition that goes back to even before the ones who told the story of Noah - and the promise inherent in the rainbow is ours to claim too, just as the Holy spirit - advocate and comforter of disciples - is ours too if we will just open our hearts.

When the URC began the Catch the Vision project, the then General Secretary, David Cornick, declared boldly - God has not finished with us yet - and nor has God finished with us even now.

As the psalmist states - The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121)

Alleluiah!      amen

**Prayers of intercession**

- for our circle of family, friends and congregation
- for our communities
- for the wider world

**Prayer of dedication**

We look back in thanksgiving and offer our gifts to be used by God and look forward in anticipation of the development of God's kingdom. Let us pray:

Loving God, for all you have given us and those who came before, we offer you thanks and bring our gifts to be used by you. May our money, time and talents, love and lives be blessed and treasured and used by you to grow your kingdom wherever we are.  
amen

As we step out of our lockdowns and shielding into the world again, we look forward in faith - so let us sing.

**Hymn - Look forward in faith**

**Blessing**

Thank you for enhancing our worship by joining with us and thanks to all who made the service possible, readers and recorders and musicians and pray-ers and editors.

Go in peace  
and may the holy God surprise you on the way  
Christ Jesus be your company  
and the Spirit lift up your life.  
amen (WCC)

Worship leader	Revd Dr Kathryn Price
Readers	Angela Owen, Mike Dugdale
Story tellers	Elis Hughes, Margaret Newbould
Prayer group	Helen Bravey, Jo Harris, Geoffrey Hughes, Brenda Rushton, Sylvia Watkin, Sheila Wilson
Musicians	Christopher Phillips, Kathryn Price, Paul Robinson

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