

TFTD 2025.25 Wednesday April 2nd
The days of Noah: Luke 17.20-37



It's odd (in a way) how Noah's Ark has become the ultimate cuddly children's toy — all those animals lining up two by two to go into the ark. I still have my own Noah's Ark, a lovely little fretwork job which my grandfather made out of an old cigar box, in the shape of a Burmese river-boat on the Irrawaddy river in modern-day Myanmar. My grandfather worked there before the war (in fact my mother was born there) — which somehow brings home even more the tragic effects of last week's earthquake.

Actually, the tale of Noah's Ark in Genesis chapter 6 is a rather terrifying story about a man-made ecological disaster threatening to engulf the whole world — including the animal kingdom. It's a reminder of how much the natural world is caught up in the damage created by human sinfulness. But it's also a story of salvation — because Noah is given instructions to build for the future. He has a chance to save the animals — but he has to act decisively and fast. First he has to listen hard, to hear God's voice in a world of "business as usual," a world that says, "Don't be daft — there's

nothing wrong — or if there is, there's nothing you can do about it." And then he has to act — which means making some hard choices, putting together a survival kit, selecting the essentials that contain the seeds of a new world beyond the flood.

We're now moving into the final chapters of Luke's Gospel. As the story gathers pace, there's a sense of foreboding in the air. Jesus is still 'on the way to Jerusalem' (17.11) — but it's getting closer. We know what is going to happen there — but Jesus' disciples don't (and when he tries to tell them (v.25), they don't believe it). They're living in the days of "business as usual" — just as it was in the days of Noah.

Jesus' vision also looks further ahead, to the final consummation when God's Kingdom will be clear and unmistakable for all to see (v.24). Somebody once said that the vision of God's Kingdom in the Bible is like looking at a range of mountains in the distance. From where you are, it all looks like one range, striding across the horizon — but as you move forward, you discover some of those mountains are quite close, while others recede into the distance. But the only way to get there is to keep going, one step at a time.

As we shall see (ch.21), Jesus is speaking at a time of political tensions, with the looming disaster of war about to engulf his listeners within a few years. It's a time when people are asking, Where is God's kingdom? (v.20). When is God going to do something — to come and exert his kingly power — to sort out the mess we're in — make people respect his laws — bring in that wonderful reign of peace and justice the prophets told us about? When is God going to start putting the world to rights?

It's a good question to ask — but Jesus' answer is surprising: They won't be saying, 'Look, here it is!' or 'There it is!' For in fact, the kingdom of God is among you (v.21). What did he mean? Within you? Within your grasp? Within reach? Whether it's climate change or world peace, it's too easy to blame all the world's problems on somebody else. Putting the world to rights has to start with recognising our own part in the problem, with realism and repentance. And that means recognising that the solution (or at least part of it) is also within our grasp. Just as Noah was given a

blueprint for building a better future, so in our own times Jesus shows us a way of living in God's kingdom here and now, taking the first steps, making it part of our lived reality today.

But there's another way of thinking about those words. God's way of putting the world to rights involves a costly commitment to vulnerability, to a way of being that doesn't fit with the questioners' suspicious way of seeing. God's kingdom was walking about amongst them, but they couldn't see it. God's kingdom was there, right under their noses, in the person of Jesus. Jesus' challenge (then and now) is to recognise the Son of Man in our midst and the costly way of peace he came to bring.

God bless,

Loveday