



2. RE-EMERGING

Setting foot in a pandemic world

Genesis 8

Out from God's shelter

No one quite knows what changes the coronavirus experience will bring to our world and future way of life. All of us are taking our first steps into a world in which pandemic is a reality. Things will return to familiar patterns gradually rather than all at once. That will be true for the economy, healthcare, education, working life and social life. And also for church life. On return, everything physical will be just where we left it, but so many of our programmes and plans were rudely interrupted and may not be so easy to pick up again.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

Q. What programmes and plans in your congregation's life were interrupted by the coronavirus?

Interruptions to the way we have always done things are not a bad thing. They cause us to think again about what we are doing, why and how. As we re-emerge from a period in which church life as we know it all but stopped, maybe God has something important to teach us. However, we won't put ourselves in a place to see that if we rush back to business as usual. Perhaps the gradual relaxation of restrictions on social distancing and gathering again, along with an understandable nervousness about going back to some of the things we have always done, can give us time to reflect on our core priorities, future programmes and plans.

Let's have a look at the familiar story of Noah emerging from the ark after the flood in Genesis chapter 8 and reflect on how it might help us come out from our experience of God's sheltering hand to set foot in a different world of church.

PARALLELS AND

PATTERNS

Read Genesis 8.

Do so slowly. Listen carefully. Pay attention to the details. Reflect on how things feel at different parts of the story. Let the story sink into your soul.

– TO TALK ABOUT –

PARALLELS

Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some parallels.

The Bible is clear that the flood was God's judgement on a sinful world. This is a specific parallel we cannot draw for the coronavirus. However, there are many parallels between Noah's experience and ours from which we can learn.

Noah and his family's re-emergence from the ark to set foot again on dry land happened gradually. The wind began to blow (v1). The rain stopped (v2). The waters began to recede (v3). A raven and a dove are sent out to test if the time to re-emerge from the ark had come (vv6-12).

Q. How do you think Noah felt while this period of waiting and uncertainty continued? How might that parallel our feelings about a gradual return to church life?

Even after the sign that the waters had gone down when the dove didn't return (v12), Noah remained inside. Only two months later God invited him to set foot in the post flood world (vv13-16). God has his own timing and it is usually slower than ours.

Q. Why might we be tempted to rush back to business as usual in our church life as lockdown restrictions ease? What might we lose by doing so?

Talk about other parallels you can see between the story and our situation today.

PATTERNS *Line up the story alongside your recent experience of living through the coronavirus pandemic. Use the questions below to help identify and talk about some patterns for living as followers of Jesus.*

God repeats the command first given to Adam and Eve to Noah when he re-emerges from the ark to multiply, be fruitful and cultivate life on the earth (v17). The world has been stripped back by the flood, but core aspects of life are to recommence and continue as before.

Q. What core activities in your congregation's life need to recommence, continue and be pursued with fresh enthusiasm after the coronavirus interruption? What previous activities in church life don't feel so important anymore?

The first thing Noah does when he re-emerges from the ark is to worship by building an altar and making a sacrifice to God (v20). God is pleased with that priority (vv21-22).

Q. What do we think should have first priority as church life begins to resume? Why? What might that reveal about us? How will we mark our gratitude to God together as we return to church life after the pandemic?

Talk about other patterns of who God is and how he acts, or lessons that we can learn in living as his followers and his church, that emerge from this story.

POSSIBILITIES AND PERSPECTIVES

POSSIBILITIES

– TO TALK ABOUT –

Take a moment to think about the initial impression this story made upon you as you read it and the discussion that you have just had. What sticks in your mind? What do you particularly sense God prompting you to think about more deeply?

Pause and take a moment on you own, or share with the person next to you, your sense of what God is saying to your congregation from your reflections on this story?

PERSPECTIVES

Prepare to share with others what impression God has made upon your heart. Do your best to put this into words. Maybe it will be the same as others, maybe it will be different. Pay attention to the conversation that is about to start so that God can deepen and widen the impact of his Word.

Share with the whole group the lessons you think God is teaching you and your congregation through his Word, by his Spirit.

PATHWAYS

TO PURSUE

– TO TALK AND PRAY ABOUT –

Thinking

What has reading this story against the background of your experience of the period of coronavirus pandemic caused you to think again about?

Living

In what specific ways will that make you change the way you live as a follower of Jesus? How might it reshape an aspect of your congregation's life?

Praying

Pray together for strength to follow through on what God has taught each person and the implications for your life together as a congregation.

PROMISE AND

PRAYER

PROMISE

*As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat,
summer and winter,
day and night
will never cease.*
Genesis 8:22

PRAYER

Lord of fresh start,
thank you for how you provide for us
in ripening harvests, rotating seasons, rising and setting sun.
None of this happens quickly,
each emerges in your time.
As we set foot again into a different world of church,
Teach us to let you set the pace,
so that we can learn the lessons of grace
that you want us to embrace.
In Jesus' name.
Amen.

