

Coram Deo
Soli Scriptura, Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia
Sermon preached at
Stouffville United Church by
the Rev. Capt Dr. John S. Niles MSM

“Plan Ahead – It Wasn’t Raining When Noah Build the Ark”

Lessons Learned from Noah

May 29, 2022

Genesis 6:9-22

Someone came up with these humorous observations or insights about life.

- 1) A balanced diet is a cookie in each hand.
- 2) Learn from the mistakes of others. You can’t live long enough to make them all yourself.
- 3) If the shoe fits.....buy it in every color.
- 4) Once over the hill you pick up speed.

We’ve come through two years of Covid, only to watch as Ukraine was invaded by Russia, and Stock market start to fall, Monkeypox arrive and a storm rip through over 600km reaching from Ontario to Quebec and affecting our area tearing the roof off the United Church in Uxbridge and damaging homes and buildings ripping up trees all around and causing power outages.

It’s been a mess. One thing after another. And that doesn’t even take into account what each of us may have been going through quietly on our own. Life is not easy.

A little girl had been trying for months to learn the art of tying her shoes. She finally grasped the knack and was able to do it by herself. Her parents expected the child to be delighted, but were surprised by her disappointment. Her father asked why she was crying. She sobbed, "I just learned how to tie my shoes." He said, "That’s wonderful, Honey, but why are you crying?" She replied, "Because now I’ll have to do it all by myself for the rest of my life."

Life gets real- real fast

That is what Noah was facing – stark reality. He looked around him and was bewildered the state of the world and how by people behaved towards each other, and he was burdened by how people had been living and how he and his family would continue to be able to live and do so safely.

So Noah, because he was a person of faith started to plan ahead. He had to release the past resentments, and ignore the present critics. And in doing so, he set a pattern for faithful forward thinking and living.

Over the next number of weeks I hope to mine from his life and legacy, lessons that we all could learn from.

Noah planned ahead because he was **looking up and letting God**.

Believing the impossible is sometimes impossible to believe. I get that. Believing the impossible *is* sometimes impossible to believe. Yet, the story of Noah compels us to believe as we look up and let God.

The problem with looking up and letting God, comes when what you are believing in and working towards hasn't ever happened before or has only happen on a few occasions but not in your own experience.

In Noah's case, there had never been a storm that was so bad that it flooded the earth. And yet, we know now because Scientists and Archeologists through Carbon Dating have shown that a great flood did happen perhaps because of a meteor or some other catastrophic event. And that there were survivors. We also know because of the anthropologists, who have studied other cultures that there has been a version of a flood story in many cultures historical accounts that are similar to the account of Noah. And yet, at the time, and even up to the 20th Century until science confirmed it; many wouldn't believe it could or did happen.

There have been people like Noah in the past who saw things coming and experienced the same sort of criticism and isolation Noah did because of it. Those who throughout history that have tried to avert catastrophic events and were ridiculed because of it.

Winston Churchill was ostracized, condemned and pushed out of office because he saw the coming Nazi Storm and the evils of Hitler and said so. He was consider unstable.

It wasn't until the Nazi Storm was upon them that they called upon Winston Churchill to lead them.

It is easy to dismiss those who have a vision for the future – and a plan to avert problems or create innovations - because that lone voice of the visionary, entrepreneur or leader pointing to the future - that seems impossible - is often asking people to *believe without seeing*.

And that is the problem; we live in a society where seeing is believing. However, I've always contended that seeing is not believing. Believing is seeing. Artists, entrepreneurs, writers and even scientist start with a vision, or thought or hypothesis. A belief. They believe it into being, or attempt to prove their belief is true. Some would say, well they don't live in the real world. In the real world we need hard facts and evidence for us to believe it. That is not allows true.

Bob Vernon, formerly with the Los Angeles Police Department, tells of how the Department would test bullet-proof vests; and demonstrate to rookie officers their value by placing the vests on mannequins and then shooting round after round at them.

They'd then check to see if any of the rounds penetrated the vests and let the recruits do so as well. Invariably, the vests would pass the test with flying colors. It was so that the recruits could see and believe that they would work. Vernon would then turn to the rookie officers and ask, "So who wants to wear it and be the mannequin?" Not one was willing.

That is the difference between seeing is believing, and believing is seeing. C. S. Lewis said, "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death." C.S. Lewis, [A Grief Observed](#).

II

Noah planned ahead because he was looking up and letting God, and because he **looked back and let go**. Although the Bible does not say it; I have no doubt that Noah experienced scathing criticism by his peers. He was portrayed as a fool or insane. He was made an object of mockery and his ship -- built far from water (probably in the middle of a giant forest) -- was probably nicknamed "Noah's Folly."

Why would I say this, because human nature hasn't changed. Yet for all the criticism, Noah kept working on that massive Ark, until the last nail and the last bucket of tar was put in place. To do this had to let go after looking back.

A customer sent an order to a distributor for a large amount of goods totaling a great deal of money. The distributor noticed that the previous bill hadn't been paid. The collections manager left a voice-mail for them saying, "We can't ship your new order until you pay for the last one." The next day the collections manager received a phone call, saying, "Please cancel the order. We can't wait that long."

Sometimes our past can hinder our present and future.

Looking back can be a way of dealing with what we can and letting go of what we can't. Some of us look back with regret and allow the past to poison the present and potentially kill the future. Others allow the glory days of the past color the present and discolor the future because "nothing could ever be as good as it was in the 'good ole days'.

The very thing that can cloud our judgment and hinder our progress is the thing that has its hold on us – and for each person it can be different. For some it may be a failed business or relationship for another it may be a failure in judgment or behavior; for another, it may be a success early in life that leaves them wondering what is the point.

We've all heard it said that "those who fail to learn from the past are doomed to repeat it." And there is much truth in that. Yet, equally important is the statement that another said, "People who live in the past are doomed to failure in the future." Living in the past (even a good past) can taint the future.

Noah had to let go of his past mistakes and the critics in the present.

One time Thomas A. Edison's building was on fire. As he helplessly watched it burn, he called his son Charles. He said, "Come here! You'll never see anything like this again!" Then Edison called his wife. As the three of them stood there, gazing at the fire, Edison said, "There goes all our mistakes. Now we can start over."

III

Noah planned ahead by looking up and letting God, looking back and letting go which allowed him to **plan ahead and press forward**. "I press on toward the goal to win the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Paul said. Noah pressed forward to complete the vision he had.

It's like the guy who sought counseling for an issue in his life, and came back and said; "My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start." "So today, I'm working hard at it. So far I've finished 2 bags of chips and a chocolate cake. I feel better already!"

In Alice in Wonderland, at one point Alice says to the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to

get to,” said the Cat.

“I don’t much care where,” said Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

If you don’t care where you are going in life then it doesn’t matter what you do or where you go.

We have also heard it said that if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. This was proved several years ago when four teenagers were arrested in the parking lot of a large mall in Lakeland, Fla., just before Christmas when, attempting to steal an automobile at random, they tried to break into a police van containing three officers on a stakeout.

That was not good planning!

Life takes planning because – as we have seen in the last couple years and days - it gets real very fast.

But often we just let life slip through our hands like the soap opera says, “like sands through the hour glass so goes the days of our lives”.

The Psalmist said, “the days of our years are threescore and ten and if by reason of strength fourscore. But we are soon cut off and we fly away. So teach us to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom and the beauty of the Lord our God will establish the work of your hands upon you...” He was saying for us to live wisely, taking each day and making the most of it – valuing every moment.

How do you value time?

- How do we value ONE YEAR? Ask a student who failed a grade.
- How do we value ONE MONTH? Ask a Mother whose baby arrived prematurely.
- How do we value ONE WEEK? Editor’s of weekly newspapers know.
- How do we value ONE HOUR? Ask someone who awaits a doctors diagnosis
- How do we value ONE MINUTE? Ask someone who missed a plane.
- How do we value ONE SECOND? Ask an Olympic Medalist, or someone who missed saying “goodbye” to a loved one they will never see again.

You think about that. Amen