

Coram Deo
Soli Deo Gloria, Soli Deo Gracia, Soli Scriptura
Agnus Dei, Qui Tollis Peccata Mundi
Deo Volente
Sermon Preach at Stouffville United Church
By the Rev. Capt Dr. John S. Niles MSM

“Be Ready-Noah was like 600 when asked to build the Arc” Series 2

June 5, 2022
Genesis 6

Whether you look old and feel young or are young and feel old Dylan Thomas has something to say to you. He wrote these words once after he saw his father wasting away one summer. Where once there was life and vitality, now in its place was apathy. He wrote a poem entitled “Do not go gentle into that good night” to his father in hopes that he would make the most of his life.

Do not go gentle into that good night
Old age should burn and rave at close of day
Rage Rage, against the dieing of the light

Wild man who caught and sang the sun in flight
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
Do not go gentle into that good night.

And you my Father, there on that sad height
Curse bless me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night
Rage Rage, against the dieing of the light

Harry Bernstein, author who published his first book, *The Invisible Wall*, at 96
in 2007

Ruth Ellis, 101-year-old African-American LGBT activist^[L]*
[SEP]

Clara Peller, Wendy's spokeswoman, famous for her “Where's the Beef?” catch-
phrase was in her 80s when she started again

Olive Riley, blogger who started blogging at 107

Arthur Winston, who at age 100 retired from his job working for the Los Angeles
Metro after 72 years missing only one day, that being for his wife's funeral in 1988."

Cervantes completed *Don Quixote* when he was nearing 70.

Clara Barton, at 59, founded the American Red Cross.

Goethe finished the dramatic poem 'Faust' at 82.

Verdi composed 'Othello' at 73, 'Falstaff' in his late seventies.

Benjamin Disraeli became Prime Minister of England for the second time at 70."²

"Pablo Picasso was still painting at age 91.
Arturo Toscanini gave his last performance at 87.
Konrad Adenauer was chancellor of West Germany at 87.

All of them faced challenges, critics and uncertainty yet they, like Noah, didn't let little things like age or critics or circumstances stand in their way.

Noah faced an unfriendly, environment, unpleasant circumstances, unreasonable people, and his uncertain future – but goes on to show that God was able to use those negative things anyway.

A poet puts it this way:

"One ship drives east, another drives west with the self same winds that blow.
'Tis the set of the sails and not the gales which determines the way we go,"

It was because of his faithfulness to God, that he was about to set his sails in the turbulent waters of life.

I

Noah was ready because he remained faithful in the face of an **unfriendly environment** because of his desire to change the world. As you heard last week whenever there is one who sets out to be an entrepreneur, visionary, writer, poet, or leader; critics and cynics appear.

One Sunday morning a man in the middle of the sermon got up and walked out. The poor minister was completely distraught by this and said to the wife of the man, "What happen? Do you think I said something wrong?" And she said, "Oh, don't worry about it. He didn't disagree with anything you said, he just has a tendency to walk in his sleep.

Teddy Roosevelt said, "It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; because there is not effort without error and shortcomings; but who does actually strive to do the deed; who knows the great enthusiasm, the great devotion, who spends himself in a worthy cause, who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement and who at the worst, if he fails, at least he fails while daring greatly. So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

When I think of Roosevelt's words I'm reminded of the words of Stephen Spender who said,

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the Spirit clothed from head to foot in song...

...Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit...

The names of those who in their lives fought for life
Who wore at their hearts the fire's center.
Born of the sun they traveled a short while towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed with their honor.

They signed the vivid air with honor because of their lovely ambition.

Do you remember Kathleen Ferrier? She was a superb contralto, much beloved, who died of cancer while still a young woman. She was once rehearsing Mahler's "*Das lied von der Erde*" with Bruno Walter when the beauty and pathos of the words and music overwhelmed her. She couldn't go on and the conductor had to call a break in the rehearsal. Miss Ferrier apologized to Bruno Walter, but he replied "Kathleen, you have nothing for which to apologize we should have all been weeping."

Noah's purpose was to save the world and anyone and anything that was willing to come along. When he began the project he didn't know if he was going to be successful. He didn't know if after building this Arc it wouldn't just sink to the bottom during the storm. He didn't know even that any storm would actually come. But what he did know was that he was going to be faithful to the vision that he had been given even in the face of an unfriendly environment.

II

Noah was ready because he remained faithful in the face of an unfriendly environment, and secondly, **unpleasant circumstances**.

Noah, we are told in Scripture "walked with God". He had an unassailable alliance with God, and the Cainite civilization failed to attract him. And we have heard that as God was reviewing the earth, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and behold, it was corrupt for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth." Yet, he remained faithful because he drew a line that cut that out.

G. K Chesterton said, "Art and Morality have this in common – they both know where to draw the line." And the purpose of drawing a line is that it can keep things in and close things out.

If you have any existential awareness - and you do because you are here – you know that one has to draw what William Blake called the "hard line of rectitude". We know this because our experience has taught us that some thoughts, action, and habits are coarsening. They are incompatible with what is refined, sensitive and gracious. Hammarskjold tells us that we can't make a garden and reserve one part of it for weeds. We may think we can; but the weeds invade the lawn and the flower beds, and soon the garden is no longer a garden but a wilderness.

Drawing the line means defining ourselves; declaring by what we leave out and what we include just who we are and what we are not. Noah, was known as one who drew a line keeping that which was refining and faithful in and that which was base and brutal out. In the face of unpleasant circumstances, he didn't become unpleasant!

Those who sing, or act, or preach or write have very similar experiences. I have listened to artists and visionaries and others who seek to impact the world in some manner and all have said and confirmed my own experience that as Jessye Norman or Janet Baker that when they

prepare themselves for a recital, for example, it is not merely a matter of learning the songs, but of preparing their whole person. Singing on Saturday means that some activities which maybe pleasant are shut out on Thursday because they are distracting. It is not that the singers can't sing, of course they can sing. It is that more than the voice must be in tune. The whole personality must be refined and ready. We can not discover what waits to be discovered in Schubert without first finding it in ourselves. That is the cost of great art. It means drawing a line somewhere. The trouble with trivia is that it trivializes. It robs us of depth. It keeps us from greatness. The trouble with gossip is that it keeps us from truth. It is not just that it is salacious, but that it lacks substance.

III

Noah was ready because he remained faithful in the face an unfriendly environment, unpleasant circumstances and thirdly, **unreasonable people.**

Noah we are told brought all those in his household onto the Arc. However, as a good Israelite that would mean anyone under his care. So if anyone had been willing to take heed of what he was saying and come along he would have included, welcomed and accepted them.

Pepper Rogers was having an awful year coaching his team. Everywhere he would go people were condemning him for the job he was doing. Everyone -- family, friends and neighbors -- were disgusted with the way the team was playing and how he was coaching. Finally, after a particularly awful day where nothing went right, he came home and said to his wife in hopes of some comfort and acceptance, "Darling, I've only got one friend in the world and I need two." So she went out and bought him dog. Now that's cruel and cold.

What do we do when we become angry at or envious of someone else? We usually try to tear them down. We point out all the negative things we can about that person, thinking that by pulling them down, we're somehow building ourselves up. Yet, that is far from the truth. The truth is as we do so, we diminish ourselves.

W. B. Yeats said,

Had I heaven's embroidered cloths
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and half light,
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

I knew of a girl who went walking in the woods on a day when the wild flowers were out, covering the earth with a blue mist and filling the air with fragrance. But she soon came in and told her mother through tears, "I can't go out walking in the woods, for with every step I take I trample flowers."

Adlai Stevenson once visited Albert Schweitzer at his hospital in Lambarene and flattened a mosquito that had stabbed him on the forehead. Schweitzer expressed his reverence for life exclaiming, "That was my mosquito!" Such sensitivity from the little girl and the old missionary; if only we allowed it to characterize our relationships.

For four decades East Berlin was controlled by the Communists. West Berlin was free. One day some people who lived in East Berlin took a truckload of garbage and dumped it on the West Berlin side as the wall was being built. The people of West Berlin could have retaliated by doing the same thing. But instead they took a truckload of canned goods, bread, and milk and neatly stacked it on the East Berlin side. On top of this stack of food they placed the sign: "Each gives what he has." You think about that. Amen.