

Today's Scripture passage is a continuation of our sermon series reading through Genesis. As we pick up with the second half of Noah's story I found myself wrestling this week with how to express the feelings I was having as I read through and contemplated this story.

The Noah story is one that is familiar to many of us who were churchgoers as children. Noah builds an ark with his family, they climb in the boat with all the animals, it rains for forty days and forty nights, Noah sends out a dove, they leave the ark and God sends a rainbow.

In my memory the story is so clean and so clear. Even though the Noah story is actually a bit more complicated than that. Noah sends out a raven and a dove, and we never hear back from the raven. Noah isn't on the ark for forty days and forty nights, that's just the start of the journey. Noah by the end of it is on the ark for just over a full year, which was probably the most staggering revelation to me on this read through.

In the previous chapter it says, in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month. The rain fell. It isn't until the twenty-seventh day of the second month on the following year that the earth is completely dry. After which God calls Noah to come out of the Ark.

I can help but feel that we dramatically oversimplify in telling this story not just to our children but to adults as well. I worry that if we do not give stories, like Noah, their full measure we can simplify the radical change that God has on our lives, and we can ignore the amount of time that change can take.

We don't know how long it took Noah to build the ark, because that wasn't included in the Bible story. They do however specify how long he was in the boat. A story that feels like it took 40 days and nights. Felt long as a child.

But in reality it took over a year. Why does this seem to matter so much to me? I feel like this aspect of this story matters because we often underestimate the amount of time it can take for things in our lives to change. Even with God's help.

I was always a quiet youth. I spent my days reading fantasy fiction books and ignoring the world around me. I barely spoke to anyone, and I wasn't very good at conversation.

Over time, I opened up to my friends, and in my final year of high school I grew at least a little bit into my mentor status both in the saxophone section in band, the bass section in choir, and in the church youth programs. When I went off to university, I spent time making friends, with folks in band, who were into nerdy things that I enjoy, who were singers in the choir, and were friends on my new friends.

I found myself in a situation I was unaccustomed to, being surrounded by people whom I was talking to with ease, and making friends. When I returned home for Christmas break I remember sitting down to talk with one of the ladies of the church who always volunteered to help lead youth group. I remember her saying to me, "Oh Austin it's so good to have you back." I said to her, "grandma Lynn, I have only been gone a few months." She replied to me, "Oh no Austin, you haven't spoken to me like this in years, it's nice to have you back."

I remember thinking that was a very odd thing to say. In hindsight however, I think she was right in many ways. I had slowly built up the skills I needed to be sociable, and to learn how to express myself, and the instant I had gained even a mild amount of talent for it I felt like I had always been this way even though it was nothing further from the truth. Change that is slow to move, and sudden to shift often leaves us with a feeling that we have changed a long time ago even when the pay off is only recent.

We are particularly bad when it comes to keeping solid track of time in both memory and in written form. When we moved here last July it was a very sudden shift in our lives. A change that would have felt immediate, save for the fact that it took about two years to go from first email to landing here in Edinburgh.

At men's Bible study last week, when we were reading the book of Acts, we were asking ourselves a question. How long has it been since Jesus Died? In early chapter 2 with the day of Pentecost, it happens shortly after Jesus death. With all of the important acts and stories that have happened after it we aren't sure what the timeline looks like until Peter is broken out of prison by an angel in chapter 12. The Herod who imprisoned Peter dies

at the end of the chapter. And he is our major historical clue to the timeline.

If you look at the length of his reign and it's distance from Jesus death we can estimate the time it took to get from Acts chapter 2 to Acts 12 is between ten and fifteen years! This revelation all in the same week I learned that Noah's whole adventure took over a year from the first raindrop to his final departure from the ark doors.

It is a shocking thing to think about, but the Bible is full of stories, where God goes at God's pace and world moves at it's own pace. We are always surprised to find that we live at a different tempo and pace than the Lord God Almighty.

God is always at work in the world around us effecting change in unseen ways. Noah's change in the world was dramatic and drastic. The change happening in our church today also feels dramatic and drastic. We have seen great change in the past three years in particular, but we have always been a changing church. After all what is a reformed church that stops reforming?

We are in the middle of a serious change, but a slow one here in Kinross. A change that we might not fully see ourselves, but new visitors and our community are seeing for themselves clearly. I have spoken with my neighbours who have noticed that the church always has something going on these days. I ran into a total stranger yesterday at the gazebo on the high street who knew my face and name from the various publications we put out.

Last year, almost a year and ten days ago it feels like, we said that we would commit to the presbytery linkage, and eventual union that was planned for our region. I was lucky enough to be there when the sessions all met that night and set forth a steering group. And we are beginning to see the fruit from that seed already.

Our family in Christ is connecting with us in more ways than ever before. Volunteers from all over the Kinross-shire parishes came out to help us with Family Week this year and we had more volunteers than ever before. Committee's who have been give similar tasks are meeting together

between our churches to discuss how we can aid one another, and reduce duplication in the future to reduce workload on our volunteer forces.

So why am I bringing all of this up in the sermon ostensibly about Noah? I am bringing this up because I have seen first hand that the good people of Kinross Parish Church have been striving towards a new future with incredible effort since I have arrived. It can be difficult to make change happen in our lives, especially when it involves such a large organizational shift and change in our lives as a whole.

However, I want to remind you, that even if we are not seeing the progress it is still assuredly happening. Noah was not able to see the changes in water for well over 150 days, when the boat rested on the mountains of Ararat, and it wasn't until 3 months later he could see the mountain tops.

Noah's life changed incredibly in a little over year, because he trusted in God and let God lead him through an amazing change in his life.

We too must trust God to lead us through the changes in our lives. Sometimes it can feel like the changes we are making have no effect, but that's simply how the human heart and mind is. We cannot see the changes until they have fully happened.

So I want to encourage you today, that God can change us, and will change our lives. Even if it is not visible today, and might not be visible until well after it's happened. God will help us to change our lives and our church, into the church we have always meant to be.

This is the good news of our scripture today.
Thanks be to God,
Amen

Rev. Austin Wicks