



STUDY 1

Action Réfugiés Montréal

by Paul Clarke, former Executive Director of Action Réfugiés Montréal

*Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove;
and it did not return to him any more.*

Genesis 8: 1-12 (NRSV)

Responsive Opening Prayer:

One: When a stranger sojourns with you in your land,

All: you shall not do him wrong.

One: You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you,

All: and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

One: Thus says the LORD of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another,

All: do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.

One: Let us worship God this day wherever we are close to our own home,

All: knowing millions of people are nowhere near their home.

Hymn: #635 – Brother, sister, let me serve you

Scripture: Genesis 8:1–12

A Reflection on Noah and boats in the 21st century

by Paul Clarke

In Genesis chapter 8 we have a familiar story of people going into wilderness. Who has not heard the story of Noah? Verses late in the chapter state that the end of the trial is near and that the worst is over. The book of Genesis has brought us from creation, “And God saw that it was good,” to “there is evil, it must be destroyed” and here we are, life starting over again after a perilous sea voyage. Noah and his family have experienced fear, loss of friends and home; they probably had no idea (other than faith in God) if they would survive or not, and they have no idea where they will make their new home. Or, whether there will even be one. They have to trust that God will care for them.

The next chapter (#9) says that, now that the time of trial is over, God covenants that there will never be a flood to cover the earth. No flood, but it should be noted that God does not say there will be no war, or famine, or genocide. God does not say there will never be problems in Afghanistan, or Syria, or the Congo.

God does say the rainbow will be a reminder of the covenant with all of creation. So, no matter what, God is with us, through difficult times. So, we must believe that God is with us. And, that God is also with refugeeed people.

Who are refugees? Legally speaking, they are persons forced to leave their country because of persecution - persecution because of their race, nationality, political opinions, their religion, or

because they belong to a particular social group. Many will live part of the Noah experience, though not necessarily with the stimulus of God saying, “You had better build yourself a big boat because trouble is coming.” People often have to leave quickly, taking what they can and fleeing from one place to another. At Action Réfugiés Montréal, they actually met a man from Eritrea who came through 12 countries before finding safe harbour in Canada. Over the years a number of Noah-type persons arrived in large boats at either end of Canada, looking for a safe home, people hoping to find a rainbow. News reports on February 2015 noted that migrants were found frozen in a boat in the Mediterranean... are they modern-day Noahs? We recall photos from September 2015 of a drowned Alan Kurdi, a 3-year-old Syrian child. In May 2016, we still saw images of boats full of refugees, hoping to cross the Mediterranean Sea to safety. In 2018, we heard of boats being turned away from Italy, Malta and other ports. This continues to happen.

God saw Noah and his family through their voyage. Noah was convinced God would, but is it so hard to believe that Noah turned to God on some of those 40 nights and pleaded: “God, why did we have to leave home? How will we survive? Will this voyage never end? What will greet us when we land? Who will greet us when we land? How will we know when the voyage is done?” Many of us have done the same when we battled a storm of some kind in our own lives. Why is this illness here? Why is my marriage going through this terrible time? Why did I lose my job? How will I find another one at this age? Why are my children having such a tough time? Who will greet us when the voyage is done? How will we know when it is safe again? People all over pray to the same God with these same questions.

We can ask the same questions about the circumstances of refugeeed people. Why did they have to leave home? How will they survive? Will their voyage never end? What will greet them when they land? Who will greet them when they land? How will they know when their voyage is done and are they truly safe? How is God helping them? As I mentioned, many of the people we meet endure forced separation from family members for many years. Many people have difficulty finding meaningful work or employment with wages that provide a dignified life.

The story of Noah is repeated in our world and God has never backed away from their covenant. We can all point to times when God has answered our prayers. Let us remember to pray at all times that justice be done for refugees here and in other countries.

Questions:

1. We are called to welcome the stranger. What concrete ways in our community can I or my WMS group heed this call?
2. We know many people object to receiving refugees in our communities. How can I call on others in my community to be more accepting?

Hymn: #641 – One more step along the world I go

Responsive Closing Prayer:

One: God of new beginnings, we turn to you in prayer asking that you send your transforming grace to all the places and communities in the world torn apart by war and violence, to the places where people cry out for your justice, freedom and peace - places like Syria, Somalia, Burundi, Eritrea.

All: Lord hear our prayer and in your love answer.

One: God of patience, please live in the hearts of people in refugee camps, those awaiting interviews to determine if they can be resettled in Canada, those who are waiting for travel plans, those fearing to cross a border, and those detained in jail-like facilities simply because they are refugee claimants.

All: Lord hear our prayer and in your love answer.

One: Send us your transforming grace as we pray together the words Jesus taught us.

All: (say The Lord's Prayer together)