

# Anglican-Lutheran Society

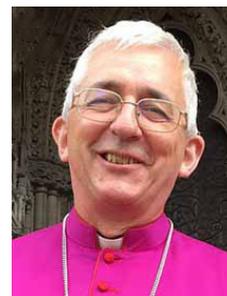
Annual General Meeting 17th March 2018

## Sermon at the Closing Eucharist

*Bishop Michael Ipgrave, our Anglican Moderator*

**Exodus 2.3: 'The woman put her son in a basket of papyrus, plastered with bitumen and pitch.'**

When our boys were little we used to carry them round in a Moses basket made of woven rushes. They looked very sweet. The basket had been passed down through our family. I was carried in it and my sisters said that I looked very sweet too! I grew up in the security of a little village in the English Midlands, in the security of English vicarages.



But it is not like that for everybody – not today and not through history. Moses' mother brought her child into the world in a time of acute danger when a sort of progressive ethnic cleansing was taking place in Egypt. All male Hebrew children were to be killed, such is the distrust and fear the Egyptians had of their neighbours.



And Moses' mother puts him in – in what? A 'Moses basket'? The Hebrew word *tebah* (תִּבָּה) only occurs twice in the Bible, here at the start of Israel's exodus, and in Genesis at the start of the human story, when God wants to save Noah and his family and all the animals from the flood and he commands Noah to build – what? A *tebah* – we say 'ark' but it's the same word translated here as 'basket'. There and here a *tebah* is a vessel that saves life in time of danger. In Genesis it's big enough to hold an extended family and two of every species. In Exodus it's small enough to cradle a little baby.

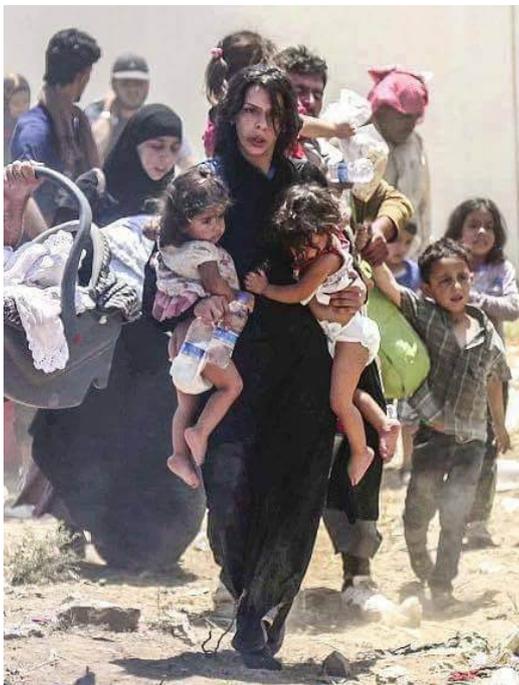
God's provision to save and renew life appears in these two different ways, communal and individual, but his purpose for our salvation does not change. Out of situations of cataclysm, of violence, disruption and persecution, through a *tebah* God brings to safety the seeds of a new humanity that will lead to a new people and a new world.

It was not easy, being born and growing up in Moses' time, and it's not easy being born and growing up in our world today. It's not for me to speak of your particular situations here, but in Europe we are experiencing movements of people unprecedented since the Second World War; people driven from their homes by war, by persecution, by cataclysm, by dangers and disruptions of many kinds. Streams of asylum seekers and refugees are searching for safety and a better life, with significant numbers reaching as far as the United Kingdom. The city of Stoke in my Diocese of Lichfield is a dispersal centre for asylum seekers. There are countless people in Southern Europe who have crossed the waters of the Mediterranean Sea in untrustworthy vessels, hoping they will be their *tebah*, their life-saving receptacle, ark or basket, and there are millions more internally displaced people in the Middle East or in their African homelands, all of them on the move.

For people like me, brought up in security on a small island, it can be hard to understand how this feels. One eye-opening experience for me was visiting the refugee camp, almost a small city, called 'The Jungle' outside Calais, looking across the Straits of Dover to England. That camp has since been demolished and its inhabitants moved to other venues in France. But there I heard stories of terrible cruelty, danger and hardship which led people to embark on long journeys from home to seek a *tebah*. We've heard the stories of Ruta and Sam today.

Warsan Shire was born of Somali parents in Kenya. She now lives in London. Listen to this extract from her powerful poem 'Home' which tells what the word 'home' means to her:

no one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well



your neighbours running faster than you  
breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his body  
you only leave home  
when home won't let you stay ...

you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land ...

no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice  
in your ear  
saying - leave, run away from me now  
i dont know what i've become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here

'No-one puts their children' – this was the experience of Moses' mother with the *tebah* which was a basket, the experience of Noah in the *tebah* which was an ark. And this is the experience of the Church of Jesus Christ – Jesus, who like Moses was a child in Egypt, rescued from persecution; and his Church which, Peter tells us, is foreshadowed in Noah's ark.

There is a different image to set alongside Jesus' gospel words today of Peter as the rock on which the Church is built. We need both – solidity and buoyancy – for both speak of God's unchanging purpose to save people and to renew humanity and the face of the earth. But think today of Church as *tebah*, as the receptacle that provides welcome and safety for the displaced, the threatened, the one for whom home has become the mouth of a shark.

This autumn in my diocese we have held training days for churches suggesting ways of welcoming and caring for refugee children and young people. That's just one small programme. Across Europe churches are being presented with this challenge and this opportunity, in the name of Jesus who was a refugee, to become *tebah* for those seeking refuge today and, in doing that, helping to shape a new humanity. Pray for us.