

We're all in the same boat

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

Broadcast on Radio Scotland, 27 November 2005

Earlier this week I stood in a garden, with my rabbi, planting a tree. The garden was the garden of Cardinal Keith O'Brien, and the tree was to symbolise the growing friendship between Judaism and Christianity. The occasion was the 40th anniversary of the Vatican declaration that set the tone for interfaith relations at the end of last century and beyond, and it was heartening to hear the Cardinal speak so warmly of Christianity's common heritage with Judaism.

The Rabbi responded by referring to the story of Noah and the Ark, which was read in synagogues throughout the world only last week. The symbolism of the rainbow which marked the end of the great Flood is that its beauty is that it contains all the colours together – apart we are nothing; together we can shine forth our message of cooperation and peace.

There is another obvious metaphor in this story – that we're all in the same boat! Noah and his family were the only people to survive the Flood, so they are the ancestors of us all – not just Jews, Christians and Muslims, but all of humanity. There's a story in the Talmud of a man who starts to bore a hole below his seat in a boat. His fellow-travellers round on him: "What are you up to? Are you crazy? If you carry on like that, we'll all drown!" But the man replies that he's only drilling under his own seat!

The message is obvious: "I'm all right Jack" is not a recipe for survival – we're all in this together. We need only look to the streets of France to see what happens if we lose sight of that. And "We're all right, Jacques" is no better, as we have seen all too graphically.

But it's also not good enough just to pay lip-service to being in the same boat. To really pull together we have to reach out to others, and perhaps to compromise a little ourselves for the greater good of all. That is part of the message of our small sapling, and we hope that as it grows, that message will grow and take firm root amongst us all