

Isaiah 40:28-31

This is the time of the year when we have been watching for eagles. Truly one of God's amazing creatures. Spotting an eagle sitting high up in a tree is spectacular. But even more so is watching one in flight.

Today we are drawn to our text in Isaiah where we read: "*They shall mount up with wings like eagles.*" These words captivate us. Just as we cannot turn away from an eagle soaring in the sky, so we cannot help but focus on these words in Isaiah.

But before we speak of eagles, we must speak of other types of birds. God's people were in captivity in Babylonia. They hardly felt like eagles. They may have felt more like a dodo. The dodo is a flightless bird. It is extinct today, but it did live in the days when God's people were in Babylonia, when Isaiah penned the words of our text.

A dodo isn't going to fly anywhere. It's pretty much confined to the land where it finds itself. And, back in those days, it was heading for extinction. This is how God's people felt. "We're confined here in Babylonia, and this may be the end of us!" No eagle thoughts here; dodo thoughts.

The dodo is extinct, except that it might still live somewhere inside of us. Fat and clumsy, wings that are useless, do we ever see ourselves as a dodo? Focusing only upon our immediate surroundings? Complaining about being confined...by health issues, by a dead-end job, or a dried-up relationship? The last dodo bird died in the late 17th century. But maybe not. Perhaps here in the 21st century it still wanders about within and among us.

And then again, sometimes we act like a chicken. A chicken is always pecking in the dirt. It's head doesn't look up. It's focus is on the ground beneath its feet. If we're not so much a dodo, do we live like a chicken? Hanging our head low, focusing only on our next meal, pretty much living life in the dirt?

And if we're not a chicken, we may act more like a peacock. Totally in love with ourself. Consumed with our life and how we appear to others. Proud, arrogant, conceited, full of ourselves.

But then again, we may be more of a crow. We'd rather gab than listen. We come to church more to visit in our little cliques than to hear the Word of God. We think that what we have to say is so important, and what others have to say just gets in the way of our crowing.

I suppose there are other birds God created to which we could draw a comparison. And most of them also would not be too flattering a likeness. And God did create all these, didn't He? Just as He created us. Maybe He wants us to take a good, hard look at these birds which He created, recognize them in ourself, and repent from where we have fallen.

Dodo, chicken, peacock, crow...Christian congregations, like ours, are made up of such birds. It's necessary that we see this. Do not expect the person sitting next to you to act like an eagle. You may be sitting next to a dodo. But then they may be sitting next to a crow. And I'm not sure how you would characterize the man in the pulpit, but it surely would be one of these birds. We have no reason, none of us do, for having a high opinion of ourself. If we do, we are not repentant.

This is what God wants. It's why He put His people in captivity in Babylonia. He wants His people, then and today, to repent; to turn away from our pecking in the dirt, our crowing, our peacock plume, and our constant complaining, and admit our sinfulness, and also our weakness and helplessness.

And as we do this, God would have us look to Him, and to wait upon Him. *"Those who wait on the Lord,"* says Isaiah, *"shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles."*

How does an eagle soar in the sky? It will position itself high up, perhaps on a rock, and wait; wait for the wind to come. For when the wind comes, the eagle is borne aloft. The power to soar is not in the wings of the eagle, but in the wind beneath its wings.

And so you, my friend, are an eagle as you position yourself high upon the rock. And your position is that of a hearer. You come like an eagle into the rock of Christ's church. You look up, away from yourself. And you listen. This is how you wait on the Lord. And all who wait on Him will soar like eagles. For His Word is the wind beneath your wings.

That wind blows today because of Jesus. We are about to enter the season of Lent. Our focus is on the sufferings and death of our Lord. The foul winds of hell blew over Jesus as He hung on the cross. He suffered and died for you, my friend. But He rose from the dead to bring forth a new wind upon the earth. A wind that comes from heaven. The wind that blew on Pentecost. The wind of the Holy Spirit that blows on all who wait on the Lord; who position themselves to confess their sins and hear the words of forgiveness.

These words are spoken here, and they are for you. You do not have the power to lift yourself up out of your sins; out of the death you and I deserve. But God's wind blows upon you as you spread your wings in faith to hear it and believe it.

"I forgive you," He says to each one of you. "I created you, but you sinned against Me. Yet I took your sin to my cross and died there for you. I baptized you into My death and resurrection. I gave you your wings of faith in those waters. I renew your strength in My Holy Supper for you. You are My eagle. Everyone of you is. You are forgiven. You are Mine, and I love you. And My words to you are the wind beneath your wings."

Eagles will often preen their wings because at night their wing feathers become matted and stuck together. This happens to us on a daily basis. This is why we preen our wings by returning to our baptism every day. How long has it been since you have preened your wings? God's wind is here now to bear you aloft. You are not a dodo. You do not have useless wings. Nor are you a chicken, a peacock, or a crow. God made you His eagle. He gave you eagles' wings. It's time to soar. To stop living in the dirt. To end our complaining and our crowing. To stop being so self-absorbed.

God's words are life and they are for you. They will take you to new heights. Soaring in the heavens, you will sing praises to God as you serve your neighbor. Life is spectacular, for you live as the eagle God has made of you. Your eagle eyes focus on the words of Jesus always. Every day you rise to soar with the eagles. Every night you preen your wings as you return to your baptism, repenting of your sins of that day. And you know and believe that God forgives you. And always you wait for the Lord. You position yourself to hear His words Sunday after Sunday spreading out your wings. And His words of love and life are always here for you. They are, and always will be, the wind beneath your wings. Amen.