Life on Wings—EAGLE part 2

Last week I started a sermon about eagles...and how scripture looks at eagles as symbols of the way we lead the christian life in relationship to our Lord.

We said that 2nd century christians said that the Christian life was like 'way of an eagle in the air.' Job, David, Isaiah, the writer of Proverbs and others knew how eagles lived and how they raised their young. They said it was like the way God deals with his people.

We talked about how mother eagles nurture their baby eagles by pushing them out of the comfortable, safe confines of their nest...even tear the nest apart, if needed, to be sure their babies know they are to fly..and to show them how...and train them to fly.

Our Lord matures us in the same way...sometimes pushing us out of what is comfortable to learn to fly and to soar. God made each of us to soar. Someone may have told you that soaring is for others...not you, but God is hear to tell you that you and everyone were created to soar.

I made an error earlier when I said the eagles were made to fly. Well, not exactlyé that was an error.

Eagles don't fly, if what you mean by "fly" is to flap their wings and propel themselves around.

Other birds do that all the time, Flutter, flutter, flutter!

They're trying to get somewhere, and they just flap around.

But Not eagles. Eagles have another way.

I remember watching these great birds through the binoculars.

There they were, on the nest or on a rock ledge ready for flight.

Every muscle of their body would be taut and ready.

I'd wait and wait, wondering, why in the world don't you take off? "Fly!"

What I didn't know, however, was that an eagle has an inborn ability to discern the motion of air currents.

The eagle will not go until the right breeze comes along.

When it comes, the eagle just lets go and rides the wind— just rides the wind.

Now, most birds are terrified by storms. But Eagles love storms that force them higher and higher and higher.

You'll remember the late movie star, Steve McQueen. Well, flying gliders was a hobby for Steve McQueen.

In a television interview I heard him tell this story about flying in the Rockies:

He hit a thermal jet of air and rode it higher and higher to 20,000 feet.

Now that's very high for a glider.

He said, "You will never believe what I saw up there. I looked out the window, and I saw eagles. It looked as though they were asleep."

The eagles rode the air currents.

They didn't have to propel themselves along. They just rode the winds.

Now, in the Hebrew language the word for "wind" is ruach, and the same word is also translated "spirit."

In the Greek of the New Testament, pneuma is the word for "wind," and it's also the word for "spirit."

In Latin, spiritus is the word for "wind" and also for "spirit."

We're talking about eagle Christians today, not ordinary Christians.

Ordinary Christians are like so many birds. Oh, they're out serving the Lord.
They're feverishly flapping their wings, doing good works for the Lord, propelling themselves along.

You know what happens? They burn out before long.
You just can't do God's work in your own strength.
It's impossible. It's not that God's work is difficult.
It's absolutely impossible.

Have you ever seen a turkey fly?

Sometimes when a turkey is frightened, it beats itself into insensibility trying to propel itself across the barnyard.

Not an eagle. An eagle is a bird that waits for the wind.

An eagle Christian is a person who is so sensitive to the movement of God's Spirit that he waits until he discerns the movement of the Spirit, and then he gets with it.
Then he's borne aloft.
Then he rides the wind wherever the Spirit takes him.

It's not all of your hard work for God that's going to count anyway.
Only that which the Spirit of God has accomplished through you will last.

Think about that for a moment.
It's not what you've done for God. That will never pass the grave.

You'll never be given the opportunity to recite your obituary of good works before the Lord.
"Lord, remember I served on the vestry once."
"Lord, I sang in the choir for fifty years."
"Lord, I listened to hundreds of sermons. That ought to count for something."

It's not what you have done for God.
It's what he has been able to do through you, and that's a different thing.

You see, these actions are products of his Spirit.

When you are working in the power of his Spirit, it's like that song says,
"You mount up with wings as eagles. You run, but don't get weary.
You walk, but not faint."

Oh, of course you get tired, but it's the kind of tiredness that's removed by a night's sleep.

It's not that exhaustion that happens when you entirely invest yourself in work by your own efforts alone.

You were made to soar on the wings of the air and of the Spirit.
Well, there are lots of other things, but I'm going to end with just one more:
a peculiar and powerful thing.

Eagles seem to have an inborn intuition when it is time for them to die.

They seem to know it in advance, as if they possess some kind of premonition that it's about time for them to die.

When an eagle is about to die, the eagle leaves the nest and goes to a great rock or a ledge.
It fastens its talons to the ledge or rock, facing into the rising or the setting sun and then dies.
It always faces the sun. Strange isn't it?

The scripture writers knew this.

Have you ever seen an eagle die? I suspect you have.
I have seen some eagles die. One was a woman named Ida.

Ida was a woman in her 70's at a church where Sue and I were serving.

She was single, had been divorced for years and had two older children, a son and a daughter, both of whom had special needs...
  
  were mentally impaired, functional, but challenged and requiring lots of attention from Ida, their mother-whom they abused.

Ida herself was the kind of person labeled when she was a child, as SLOW. Her parents had put her and her sister in an orphanage when they were young. They worked the fields as kids, never went to a regular school.

As Ida grew older she left the orphanage and was trained for one job, house cleaning, which she did most of her life. She was the sexton at the church for years.

When Sue and I first visited this church where Ida attended, she was the first to reach out, welcome us, take us to coffee hour and tell us all about the church and what a great congregation it was. She made us immediately feel welcomed and indeed called to serve there.

Ida was the kind of person everyone knew, she was open about her faith and although her life had been very hard and even now in her 70's she had little money to live on. Still, she thanked God openly and regularly for all his blessings on her. She was an example to everyone else.

When the church would have a fund raiser, like selling hoagies, Ida would take hoagies and go door to door to literally every house in the community selling hoagies...and she sold hundreds!

When we had spaghetti dinners Ida would stand out on the street encouraging people to come in. Ida didn't have some of the inhibitions that the rest of us have.

When I would visit, Ida always had a list of people she was praying for...her kids, her sister, others in the church...never herself.

Ida was beloved by everyone who knew her. Her kids, grown ups now, were a constant source of pain, stealing money from her and making her life difficult.

When she was about 75, Ida developed a cancer on her face that caused her to have literally half of her face removed and rebuilt with plastic surgery.

As soon as she was able, although her face was badly scarred, she was back at church, back out in the community doing for others.

Well, her cancer recurred and soon it was clear that Ida wouldn't recover. I remember going to see her one night in the hospital the night before a serious surgery. She knew she might die.
  
  she said God had told her it would be ok.

She had a relationship with God like no one I have ever known...it was like he was sitting right beside her talking to her.

I asked her if she wanted to pray that night in the hospital.
  
  She said she wanted to sing.

She was weak, and could hardly talk but wanted to sing a hymn. Which hymn, I asked her. #427, When Morning Gilds the Skies.

She knew the words by heart, I didn't. I opened my hymnal and we sang together in the dim light of that hospital room.
  
  When we finished, she looked at me and said, "I'm not afraid. God said it's ok."

By the time I got home that night, her son called and told me she had died.

I had seen an eagle die, and there was never a trace of fear.
  
  She knew where she was heading.
I know heaven's a wonderful place, but I want you to know it held no surprises for Ida. She had known the Lord for years, and she just walked right into his presence.

She knew the Lord, as the book of Job says, "as a friend and not as a stranger."

I witnessed something I will never forget. I had seen an eagle die.

Her feet were firmly planted on the rock of Jesus Christ and she was looking straight into the Son of God when she died.

I believe there's a Christian way to die.

Who can explain the mystery of death?

Sometimes it snatches a person away in the prime of life with great suddenness. Sometimes it happens gradually after a long and debilitating illness.

Who can explain these things, this mystery surrounding it?

But I want to tell you this. To those who are eagle Christians, there is a triumphant entrance into heaven. So there you have it: God's word to us today.

Today, we welcome two new eaglets, Olivia and Chase, into the great family of eagles.

The extent to which they reach their full potential as eagle Christians is up to those who train them up who assure they know their potential and invest in their reaching it.

My prayer is that you will remember that if you are ever going to become a Christian, you have to be "reborn" one.

My prayer is that you understand something about the ways of God in caring for you and rearing you, and maturing you.

And you understand in those dark moments when you seem to be falling, or your nest comes apart, that it's God's purpose not to hurt you only that you may soar.

I pray that you will understand how to move on the wings of the Spirit, so that your efforts may last and you will not grow weary.

I am going to pray that you will be able to see as an eagle sees not just discouragement, not just problems, but opportunities that God will give you the opportunity to see His hand at work in this troubled world about us.

And when it's time to die, I pray that He will grant to each one of us an abundant entrance into His Kingdom...feet on the rock, eyes on the Son of God.

I pray that God will emblazon on your memory forever the image of an eagle, so that in later years, you have occasion to hear about the eagle or see it or see a picture or something, the sum of the truth we've talked about these 2 weeks will come back to your mind.

You'll forget the words, and that's unimportant. But I think you can remember the truth.

Amen.