

## **ROOTS AND WINGS**

### **3) On Eagle's Wings**

**Rev. Ron Dunn**

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“There are two lasting gifts that we can give to our children. One is roots; the other is wings.” This nugget of wisdom provides the inspiration for our stewardship campaign this fall. Over the past two weeks, we have been thinking about the ways in which the roots of our tradition and the teachings of Jesus have provided (and are providing) the nourishment and wisdom needed not only by our children, but by all of us who are a part of the community of faith. In a culture of shifting sand, we offer a place to stand.

This morning, our focus shifts from the need for rootedness in the teachings and traditions of our past to the need for wings that enable us to not only dream about a better world, but actually take the steps needed to make that world a reality. One of the great gifts that we can provide our children—and for each other—is the gift of wings.

Our lesson from Isaiah 40 is one of my favorite scripture passages.

A couple of weeks ago, I found myself sitting on the banks of the beautiful Madison River in Montana. The sun was setting and I was weary from a day of wading and fishing that impressive river. As I sat there on a rock surveying the beauty of it all, two bald eagles flew over—a mere 30 feet overhead and I was mesmerized. The size of their wing spans, the quiet grace with which they flew and the majestic way they drifted across the sky completely captivated me and I watched them until they were but specks in the distance.

This, for me, is the visual that comes to mind when I read from our first lesson this morning: “Those who wait for the Lord...will mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary.” There is, at the very heart of our faith, the promise that our God is a God who empowers, a God who uplifts, a God who enables to soar with the grace and majesty of the eagle. While life has a way of wearing us down, and, at times, exhausting our sense of hope and possibility, our God has way of lifting us up and empowering us with a sense of hope, energy and possibility for our future.

In a world such as this—so often clouded with cynicism and despair—that is no small thing. We need, just as our children need, reasons for hope, reasons to believe in the possibilities of our future, reasons to still conclude that the best is yet to come. And that is, it seems to me, one of our primary assignments as a church—to create a future of possibility and hope, a future that is worthy of our interest and our investment. Not only do our children need roots that will ground them in the traditions of the past, they also need wings that will lift them to the possibilities of an exciting future.

This is precisely, I believe, what our faith makes possible. For, by its very nature, it refuses to accept the status quo as the template the world that is yet to be. By its very nature, it dares to suggest that the darkness and injustice that may characterize the present need not define the parameters of our future. By the grace and power of the God who makes all

things new, there is a light that shines in the darkness and the darkness has not and indeed, will not overcome it. God's love, you see, is stronger than the forces of death and darkness. That is the fundamental premise of our faith and the foundation upon which we build it.

While it is difficult, if not impossible NOT to be discouraged by the scope of the evil and injustice presently making its presence known in our world, there is, at the very epicenter of our faith, the uplifting promise that God is even now at work and that we have the opportunity to share in the good and important work that God is doing. It is in this understanding then, that we dare to suggest that we have not only the opportunity, but we have the responsibility of providing our children with the wings that will carry their hopes and dreams into a future need not be limited by our present.

When they dare to dream of a world that is not shackled by prejudice or bias, a world where people are valued for who they are regardless of race or gender or ethnicity, our task is not to dismiss that dream as if it were unrealistic or impossible, our job is to take that dream seriously and to invest the resources of our lives in the work of helping to make it come true. Needless to say, we have much work to do.

Last spring, our church council members held a retreat at San Damiano in order to think together about where we are on the journey that we share and where we want to go. Our leader, Greg Berquist, one of our conference District Superintendents, helped to guide us through this process.

As a part of his presentation, he shared with us this organization arc of growth and decline. He suggested that every organization—including church organizations—move through this cycle. As you can see there is the start-up phase, a time of gaining resources and ideas, a time of building those resources into a fully functional and operational organization—one that is ideally, “hitting on all cylinders.” That phase would be represented by the apex of the arc.

Then, invariably, with the passing of time, Greg reminded us that this “prime time” phase becomes “past prime time” and the organization moves into the early stages of decline. If left unchallenged or unchanged, this the momentum of decline gains traction and, over time, is evidenced by a growing decline of resources, people, vision and energy. This, Greg told us, is a reality that every organization can, at some point, anticipate. It is a fact of life.

But then he went on to explain that the solution to the challenge of inevitable decline is to use the existing people, resources, energy and vision to “relaunch” a new vision that will set in place a new arc of growth and decline. That is what healthy companies do to enable them to weather the ups and downs of organization life. They reinvent themselves as they reinvent their vision for the next leg of their journey into the future. This is, of course, precisely what Apple does every year with their launching of new products and updated iPhones. It is any organization must do if it is to have a viable future.

Greg asked us to place ourselves as a church somewhere along this arc of growth and decline and most of us felt that we were past the apex by a few degrees, but not yet to the

place where decline was inevitable. Greg suggested that this was good news because, as he pointed out, we still have the people, the resources, the vision and the energy to relaunch our trajectory for ministry and mission. We can still do that, he suggested, if we put our minds and heart and hands together to reinvent a new and compelling vision for our future. If we don't do that, we will most likely find ourselves in a place that we don't want to be—moving forward with gathering speed to our demise.

The “take away” for me from that conversation was this: Right now, we have a wide open window of opportunity to relaunch the vision of a new ministry and as we retool ourselves for the work before us. Far from being “bad news,” it really is “good news” because we have the ability and the vision to do something about it. If we choose to wait for another ten or fifteen years before responding to this challenge, it will, in all likelihood, be too late.

Today is the day. Now is the time. The window of our future and all of its possibilities is wide open. I like the cartoon that depicts a corporate board meeting complete with charts and diagrams. The presenter is saying to the group gathered around the table, **“Unfortunately, when our last window of opportunity opened up, we crawled out of it rather than into it.”** I trust that this is something that will not be said of us.

As we think about that future and the vision that will move us into it, it is no secret that our new ARC Building and our recreational ministry will play a primary role.

When we first began to talk together about the possibility of a gym and our reasons for moving forward with the construction, the key consideration for doing so was the fact that in a recreationally focused culture, this ministry would provide us with a unique opportunity to connect with our culture in ways that we, otherwise, could not.

This ministry, you see, involves far more than merely hosting basketball games and volleyball matches. It opens the door to exciting prospect of developing new relationships with the members of our community as we seek to meet their physical and spiritual needs. This new building and the ministries that we create within it will serve as a primary point of entry into the life of our congregation and the various other ministries that we offer

What this congregation, like any congregation, needs is wings that make it possible for new ideas, hopes and dreams to become the fixtures of our future. By the grace of God and the generosity of some, we have been lifted by the wings of a new building, new landscaping and an exciting strategic plan. There is no question that we have been blessed. But to what end is this blessing?

I am inclined to believe that we have been blessed to be a blessing...blessed to be provided with the resources, the ideas and the energy needed to connect with our community in a very exciting way. I believe that we have been blessed to be a blessing as we use our campus and our resources as a launching pad for ministry and mission—making a difference in people's lives—not only within our faith community, but within our local and global community as well. Through the gifts that have already been given and through the

gifts that we will yet give through our campaign, we can, in fact, be, the “wind” beneath our children’s wings, we can help to make their hopes and dreams for a better world come true.

Given the nature of our world in this present moment of time, there are some who are quite convinced that the “glass” of our future is not only half empty, but leaking badly. I want to be clear that I am not one of them and I trust that neither are you. For, as people of faith, we dare to see the glass not only as “half full,” but as being filled to overflowing. We dare to believe that our God has blessed us to be a blessing, that we have a window of opportunity before us that makes possible an exciting and dynamic future—one full of the possibility of growth and service.

Let’s just make sure that we don’t crawl out of it, but that we crawl into it and get in on the good work that God is doing.

While it is very easy to feel discouraged when we look at our world today, we would do well to take Isaiah’s council to heart...**“Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” (Isaiah 40: 31)**

**Amen.**