

SERMON AT YORK: 6/1/2000: OS 5: ISA 40:21-31: GEOFF CHADWICK:

“EAGLES WINGS”

“Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but 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” (Isa 40:30-31, NRSV).

My wife, Gabby and I, once climbed Mount Toolbrunup in the Stirling Ranges in the South West. If you know it, it is the second highest peak in the Stirlings (Bluff Knoll being the highest). Even so, it is much harder to climb. There are warning signs at its base stating that those with weak hearts or other known medical conditions should not attempt the climb. Furthermore, the round trip is something like 4 hours.

Now, we climbed having arrived prepared with strong hiking boots and water supplies. The climb began gradually, with a gentle rise until the path became gravelly and slippery under foot – one step forward and two back; or so it seemed. Then the steep bit where every step was like walking up a ladder. Gabby, being much fitter than I went ahead – that kept me disciplined as I did not want to be defeated by her “high flying” exploits. So we pressed on with many stops, with hearts pounding and with muscles straining. Finally we broke through the undergrowth that had accompanied us thus far to discover boulders. Yes boulders – with white marking posts sticking up amongst them showing the way. The was an all fours job – requiring the crawling action of a one year old and the climbing abilities of a two year old. Onwards and upwards we went – (at this point I might add that I overtook Gabby perhaps climbing is my forte rather than hers!)

When this was all over – just when we thought we were near the top - we were confronted with a cliff face and the white posts. Up we went one foot in front of the other until, by surprise, we were at the summit. The summit was flat, yet strewn with large boulders on which one could sit. There was a magnificent 360-degree view – even almost to the ocean. The Stirlings were below us with undulating hills of unmistakably WA bush land. The air was cold, we were warm, we were exhausted, and yet excited at having reached our goal. Then overhead, in the air, in the midst of the silence of the rushing wind flew a Wedged Tail eagle. A large, beautiful specimen riding the thermals and effortlessly scanning the hills for food. To this Eagle we must have seemed clumsy. It gazed at us as if to say; “This is my territory I belong here you are misplaced.” I gazed at the eagle and thought “Show off!” After all this effort, after all this pounding and scrambling and climbing, there you are soaring like an eagle – ah yes but that is what eagles do. You indeed are free to ride the wind!”

“Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but 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” (Isa 40:30-31, NRSV).

Perhaps Isaiah had been up a mountain. Certainly he knew the power of the symbol of the eagle.

This is a Eucharist, and every Eucharist is meant to be an act of healing. Even so we don't come to the Eucharist looking for magic potions to heal all our infirmities. As

Christians we are not “Snake oil” sellers who offer false hope to the gullible or misguided. As Christians we gain our healing through the hope, inspiration, and love offered to us through the Eucharist. As we contemplate the one who gave this gift to us on the night before he was brutally executed, we understand that no hardship of ours is too great for God to bear. The beauty of the Last Supper captivates us and we know our wholeness in the midst of our brokenness.

We come battered and bruised by life. We come exhausted from the hard slog up the mountain of life. We come weary from the climbing over the boulders of life. We come seeking some health in an otherwise unhealthy world. Then we stop – we take a breather – and we catch a glimpse of the beauty of this world. We stop and the eagle visits us with a display of serene strength on the free flowing wind. The eagle, an ancient symbol of renewal, shows us how to be whole. The eagle, flowing with the wind, the eagle at home in its environment, the eagle, daring to rise above the limitations of us earthly humans – gives us a lesson. We discover that wholeness comes as we allow the wind of God’s Spirit to direct our lives. We discover that wholeness comes in working with the beauty of our surroundings, and wholeness comes when we dare to rise above the mundane and soar into the imaginative leadings of God.

In Eucharist, in worship, we dare to be whole for “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” (Isa 40:30-31, NRSV).

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.