

Grace and Peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. The Message comes to us today from the Old Testament book of Exodus, chapter 19:1-6

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the people. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

Dear congregation!

After the miraculous deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 1-15) and several months of making their way through the desert wilderness (16-18) the Israelites have arrived at Mount Sinai and are camped at the foot of the mountain (19:1-2).

Central to this text is the message from God in vv. 4-6.

This word from God in 4-6 recognizes that there is already an established relationship between God and the ones addressed. These words are not aimed at just any people, but at the "house of Jacob," the "Israelites." (3). These are not words which God speaks **about** these people, but this is I-you language, where God addresses the people directly: "You have seen what I did...how I bore **you on eagles' wings**...and brought **you to myself**..."

This word from God begins with a reminder of what God has done for this people, first in literal language ("what I did") and then with a metaphor ("how I bore you on eagles' wings

and brought you to myself"). The picture is that of a parental eagle bearing one of its young on its wings. (see image) Also in Deut. 32:11 we find further eagle imagery: "*As an eagle stirs up its nest, and hovers over its young; as it spreads its wings, takes them up, and bears them aloft on its pinions, the LORD alone guided his people.*"

These words describing GOD's intimate love and affection for us, his people, do not speak of a GOD who is far away or unapproachable, a GOD who only wants to be with himself far away in heaven. No, they speak of a GOD who wants to be with us, a GOD who wants to journey with us. Even when we go through the desert experiences of our lives GOD wants to be close, wants to guide and carry us through. GOD wants to be with us. This is a very important and key experience that has its beginnings way back in the earliest history of Israel and remains relevant and alive to this very day.

Today we hear God's voice speaking to us through Moses. We hear words that have to do with our very lives, words that uplift and carry our lives. Poetic words describing to us just how much God loves us. With vivid imagery God tells the story of how he has carried us, how is still carrying us. Like on the wings of an eagle. A wonderful picture! There couldn't be a more beautiful way for GOD to express how much He loves us and carries us, whilst at the same time granting us a soaring freedom. What a glamorous and graceful picture of GOD's intimate love for us we are given today!

Allow me to show you "the ways of an eagle" in the nest, and give you a picture of our lives as well. After the eaglets get to a certain size, or maturity, everything changes! One day the mother eagle comes back from being gone, but this time there's no food in her beak, and she doesn't land on the edge of the nest. Instead, she hovers over the nest.

You may not know this, but an eagle can do almost what a little hummingbird can do. Even though they are great birds, they can remain almost motionless in midair with those great

wings just undulating in the breeze. They do this about three feet above the nest. I'm sure if little eagles could talk to one another—and maybe they can—one would certainly say, "My, what strong wings Mommy has."

Why does the mother do this? She is demonstrating that those curious appendages on the babies' backs have a useful function. Eagles, of course, were meant to fly, but they don't know that. If we take an eagle and separate it at birth from its parents, it will never learn to fly. It will just grovel around in the dirt like a chicken. It might even look up and see eagles soaring overhead and never guess that it was meant to soar in the heavens.

Eagles have to be taught, and that's the mother's job. So first she just demonstrates. The next thing she does is come down into the nest and surprise her young. One can imagine how warm it must normally be for the little eagles to snuggle with their mother and be enshrouded with her feathers, but this time she puts her head up against one of the little ones, and pushes that little one closer and closer to the edge of the nest. ("Hey mom, what are you doing?")

All at once she pushes the little one out of the nest, and the eaglet falls down the face of the cliff, surely to be destroyed. But not so! In a flash, the great mother eagle flies down, catches the little one on her back, and flies up and deposits it in the nest. ("Whew! Mom, that was close!") The mother bird pushes the little one out again, and again, over and over.

Why would a mother do that to her young? Does she hate the little one? Not at all. It's just that those little birds were made to fly, and they don't know it, so she is going to push them out of the nest. She never lets them hit bottom, but she does let them fall, because they have to learn something they don't know.

The next time the mother bird comes back she decides to clean house, and so she stands on the edge of the nest. The first things to go are the feathers inside; she drops them over the edge. Then the leaves go over the edge. While this is going on, she's not very talkative,

either. ("Mom, what are you doing?") She pays no attention. Since she built the house, she knows how to take it apart.

Next, she decides to take the sticks out of the middle of the nest, and with her great strong beak and feet, she's able to break them off and stand them straight up. ("Mom, it's not comfortable in here anymore.") Then she takes certain key sticks out of the nest and throws them over the edge. ("Hey, mom, you are wrecking my room.")

She seemingly pays no attention to the concerns of her young as she prepares to pull the nest apart, for she is determined that those little ones will fly, and she knows something they don't. She knows they will never fly as long as they remain in the nest.

The thrill of soaring begins with the fear of falling...Until the children find out the purpose of their wings they will never fly. Eagles teach their young ones to fly by carrying them on their wings. They teach them to trust that they will be caught in time and brought back up again. **"You have seen what I did...how I bore you on eagles' wings...and brought you to myself..."** God lets us fall sometimes, so that we may learn the purpose of our lives – we were meant to fly, to soar on wings like eagles, not remain on the ground groveling in the dirt.

This word from God includes a promise that we will be the LORD's treasured possession, a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. God provides for us another precious gift – words that guide and teach us how to live in freedom as God's people, how to soar with Him in the vast open skies. The Israelites are given the ten commandments by God through Moses. They have just experienced God's deliverance from slavery.

The same thing happened for us on Calvary. The picture of God as an eagle bearing us on eagle's wings can be brought right through to Jesus Christ. In Jesus God meets us in the flesh and bears the burden of our sin and guilt, our fears and our shame, our heartbreak and our Godforsakenness, and even our death

on his back – on his pinions, his wings so to speak. **Christ bearing our sin and guilt, our pain and sorrow, and our death on the Cross – can be brought together with GOD bearing Israel on his eagle's wings in the desert.** On Christ's wings lies the whole burden of our lives and everything that threatens our lives. There He carries us still and leads us on the way of freedom all the way to the promised land of life eternal. Christ's resurrection opened the way of life and freedom for us.

With the young eaglets who learn to fly it is the same way. Simultaneously they learn to be free and strong, able to fly on their own, to explore life in its great vastness.

At Sinai Israel receive a new identity, a new way of life in relationship with GOD. Essentially, what God was saying is, "This is what it looks like to live in a free and blessed relationship with me, the God who has redeemed you." And God will give the promise of redemption's (not work's) reward: the privilege of being to God a priestly kingdom and a holy nation – A people set apart for a special calling to do God's work among the nations. In a similar way, as Christians we all share redemption's work of worshiping God, serving our neighbors and caring for God's good creation. God wants us to live out of His love and care for us. We are set apart for this special calling. God wants us to live in relationship with Him, this gracious and liberating GOD, through the everyday activities of our lives. The desert experiences and the experiences of falling into oblivion will still come around now and again. But then we must just remember God's faithfulness and listen again to the words: **"You have seen what I did...how I bore you on eagles' wings...and brought you to myself..."** Also to the words Jesus said centuries later: **See, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.** Don't be afraid. Go ahead. Take a risk with me. Live. Soar. I am always with you...

Amen.