

## **HELD: AS ON THE WINGS OF EAGLES**

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

January 17, 2021

TEXT: Isaiah 40: 9-11, 28-11

Remember the story of Chippie the parakeet? It's a story Max Lucado told about this wonderful bird named Chippie that filled the house where he lived with beautiful songs. But, as life often does, tragedy was just around the corner for Chippie...and he never saw it coming.

One day, Chippie's owner decided to clean out the bottom of Chippie's cage with the vacuum cleaner. She took the attachment off the end of the hose to stuck it in Chippie's cage. Suddenly, the telephone rang. She picked the phone up and had barely said "hello" when all of a sudden, the open vacuum got too close to Chippie and she heard the horrible sound of Chippie being sucked up into the vacuum canister. Quickly, this lady hung up the phone, tore the vacuum bag open and rescued the stunned parakeet. Thankfully, Chippie was alive!

Of course, Chippie was covered with dirt, so she stuck the poor bird under the bathroom faucet to clean him off. While clean, she noticed that Chippie was now shivering from the bath. Being a compassionate owner, she then proceeded to use her hair dryer to dry him off! Poor Chippie never knew what hit him!

A few weeks after this story was published, the newspaper reporter checked up on Chippie's condition. The reporter asked the woman how her bird was doing. She reported, "Well, Chippie doesn't sing much anymore. He just sort of sits and stares."<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes, like Chippie, life hits us, with unexpected blows. We get sucked up by life's troubles, drown in a river of woes or blown away by grief. It can be anything – a medical diagnosis, a relationship that is broken, the loss of a loved one, a dream that dies. But whatever the trouble, like Chippie, you lose your joy and you just don't sing much more.

Or, as we look over this past year, we find ourselves being overwhelmed by all the craziness of this past year. If it's not one thing, it's another - "bombshells" that seem to be hitting us – and we wonder what in the world will happen next. A pandemic has caused fear and health concerns. Separation and isolation. An economic crisis. The ugly, painful scenes of racism – protests and riots. Storms and fires. A divided country in politics – and then the attack on the capitol. Have you ever felt weary with it all? Overwhelmed and tired? Not sure you can take much more?

If all you do is watch the news – you certainly can feel that way! And if you are trying to go it alone – and depend on how strong you are – you certainly find yourself straining and struggling and about to wear out.

But there is good news! You are held by a Heavenly Father that loves you dearly and is holding you through the turbulent times and will carry you through it all.

This is the good news that we hear in our passage for today from Isaiah 40. The prophet Isaiah wrote to a group of downhearted and weary Jewish exiles, living in Babylon. They were discouraged and defeated – living in a foreign land, filled with false beliefs and fearful rulers. They needed to be reminded about WHO God is and be confident that God would take care of them – no matter what

happened in their earthly life. God had not given up on them – or abandoned them. God would be there to help them get through the trials of life and would lift them up, as on the wings of an eagle.

And here's the wonderful message! This is good news for you and me! Those same words, spoken over 600 years before Christ, are still true today for you and me.

Hear these words of comfort and hope from Isaiah 40:9-11 and 28-31, as Bill Jewsbury reads, from the Message Bible:

*<sup>11</sup>Climb a high mountain, Zion.  
 You're the preacher of good news.  
 Raise your voice. Make it good and loud, Jerusalem.  
 You're the preacher of good news.  
 Speak loud and clear. Don't be timid!  
 Tell the cities of Judah, "Look! Your God!"  
 Look at him! GOD, the Master, comes in power,  
 ready to go into action.  
 He is going to pay back his enemies  
 and reward those who have loved him.  
 Like a shepherd, he will care for his flock,  
 gathering the lambs in his arms,  
 Hugging them as he carries them,  
 leading the nursing ewes to good pasture.  
<sup>27-31</sup>Why would you ever complain, O Jacob,  
 or, whine, Israel, saying, "GOD has lost track of me.  
 He doesn't care what happens to me"?  
 Don't you know anything? Haven't you been listening?  
 GOD doesn't come and go. God lasts.  
 He's Creator of all you can see or imagine.  
 He doesn't get tired out, doesn't pause to catch his breath.  
 And he knows everything, inside and out.  
 He energizes those who get tired, gives fresh strength to dropouts.  
 For even young people tire and drop out,  
 young folk in their prime stumble and fall.  
 But those who wait upon GOD get fresh strength.  
 They spread their wings and soar like eagles,  
 They run and don't get tired, they walk and don't lag behind.*

Thank you, Bill! I love that image of God! God, like the Good Shepherd, gathers the lambs in His arms and hugs them as He carries them and leads them to good pasture. God sees me and knows me, in whatever I am going through, and sometimes – when He knows I am just so weary and out of strength – He comes and scoops me up and holds me in His arms and carries me through.

And here's what is amazing – as I wait on God, He will take my weariness and my weakness and gives me His strength and power! We, who have limited strength and power, can be filled with God's limitless and infinite power. And with God at work within us, we can actually soar as on the wings of an eagle.

You know, the image of an eagle soaring in the air, is so different than that story we began with about Chippie, the parakeet – who was so traumatized by all that happened to him. This is a story of overcoming -finding strength and freedom – and hope!

Have you ever watched an eagle soaring through the sky? Ron Hutchcraft describes it this way: *“(Eagles) usually don't come out until later in the morning when the warm air starts rising and creating those thermal currents. They travel, not by the strength of their flapping wings, but by catching the wind beneath their wings and soaring. (It is) a beautiful picture of someone who hasn't been able to do it, no matter how hard they've flapped their wings - someone who finally relaxes and lets God lift them where they have not been able to take themselves. Soaring like an eagle. Some of the most powerful words you can speak are these, "Lord, I can't. But You can." <sup>1</sup> You're exhausted - He's not. You're weak - He's not. You're out of answers - but He's not. He is everything you need and He will get you through!*

Tracy Jackson has been able to “fly on as on the wings of an eagle” as she had faith in her all-powerful God this year. Let’s hear her testimony about faith and hope.

### ***TRACY SHARES HER TESTIMONY***

*When I first received my star word two things came to mind. First, I thought about a song we sang with our Jr. High Youth Group in Chicago. The song was called “FAITH”, and the words go something like this... YOU GOT TO HAVE F-A-I-T-H, YOU GOTTA HAVE FAITH.*

*F - A - I - T - H  
You Gotta have Faith!*

*Faith will lift you high above  
Your worries and your fear  
Trusting in the Father’s Love  
You know He’s always near*

*When you put your faith in God  
You live courageously  
And when you obey His Word  
You’ll find you’re flyin’ free*

*You Gotta have Faith!*

*The second thought that came to mind was a verse in Hebrews. Hebrews 11:1. Now faith is the confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

*So, when 2020 started my mind was set on “something new”. I wasn’t quite sure what that meant but I wanted “something new”. I started off the year with Isaiah 43:19, which reads “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland”.*

*And on January 1<sup>st</sup> of 2020 I felt in my heart that God was going to do something new.*

*And we all experienced something new. Wouldn’t you agree? I would say that there were times*

*where life just completely overwhelmed me and I felt like I could just get swallowed up in it all.  
And then I remembered my star word. Faith.*

*Francis Chan once said that true faith means holding nothing back. It means putting every hope in God's fidelity to his promises. That's what I had to do in 2020.*

*I have got to have Faith. And not just "oh, just have faith". I'm talking about falling down on your knees and declaring your faith to God. I declared that I would have faith and follow God and not my fears.*

*I did start something new in 2020; it just wasn't the "new" I expected. I spent 2020 praying more, reading daily scriptures. Reading the entire Bible in 9 months (It usually takes me 12 months!). I started to work on me. Spiritually and Physically. I committed to healthy eating and daily exercise. And as 2021 came around I just committed to doing what I started in 2020.*

*My star word this year is "Comfort". I want to allow God's presence to fill my heart every day, and so for 2021 I am claiming Philippians 4:6-7. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Thanks so much Tracy! May it be that we all hang on to that faith as we face whatever happens in 2021.

As I come to a close, let me share just one more story. It is about my mother. My mother had breast cancer that lasted for 8 years. But she had a deep faith and knew that as she depended on God, He would carry her through the struggles and pain.

One of the ways she would "restore her soul" was to sit down and play the piano. Her favorite song was "Whispering Hope" – with words that talk about the comforting word of hope – waiting until the darkness is over and hoping for the sunshine tomorrow, after the shower is gone.

As she drew near to the end of her life, she began to lose her eyesight in one eye and was rapidly losing it in the other. It frustrated her greatly not to be able to read.

But amazingly, that didn't stop her. That year the new Chalice Hymnal had been published and she was so happy to get a copy. She would often play the piano, playing those old familiar hymns and learning new ones. The new hymn that became her favorite was called "On Eagle's Wings". It is a great hymn that quotes Psalm 91. The chorus of the hymn goes like this:

*And He will raise you up on eagle's wings -  
Bear you on the breath of dawn -  
Make you to shine like the sun -  
And hold you in the palm of His hand.*

I am sure that those words gave my mother hope as she prepared for her death. Again, and again, as she played those notes, she was reminded that she was kept in the palm of God's hand.

I will never hear that song again without being reminded of the amazing power of God to bring light out of darkness, hope out of despair and comfort out of grief.

Friends – you are held in the palm of God’s hand! He will carry you in His arms and restore your soul. And as you wait on Him, He will exchange your weakness with His strength and your weariness with His joy and hope – so that you can soar as on the wings of an eagle!  
And that’s a promise you can count on! AMEN

## RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup>Max Lucado, introduction to his book *The Eye of the Storm*,  
<http://www.deaconsil.com/catalog/product1005.html>

<sup>2</sup>Ron Hutchcraft, “The Hand in the Dummy”, <https://hutchcraft.com/a-word-with-you/your-hard-times/the-hand-in-the-dummy-2975>

## BENEDICTION

And may God give you the strength and freedom of an eagle.  
May Christ be the bread that nourishes and renews you.  
And may the Holy Spirit be the rising wind beneath your wings. AMEN