

Proper 6A: 6/18/23  
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If you should happen to come upon me sitting on an airplane,  
you'd likely find my eyes glued, reading intently, on a Kindle.  
Now, if it were any one of you, I might be willing to  
put the book aside for a few minutes.  
Otherwise, I'd be totally engrossed, reading, for most of the trip....  
*except* for those moments when the plane is accelerating  
off the runway into the air.  
At that critical juncture, I'd put aside the Kindle long enough  
to close my eyes, place my hands palm up on my lap,  
do some deep breaths and mutter,  
"Carry us on eagle's wings and bring us to yourself.  
Carry us on eagle's wings and bring us to yourself...."  
for as many times as it takes until we reach cruising altitude.  
I'm not particularly afraid of flying; just practical.

Maybe you've already figured out that this line comes from today's  
Hebrew scripture, the reading from the Book of Exodus.  
Moses reports that's how God describes the act of bringing the people  
from slavery in Egypt to freedom:  
"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you  
on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."

What a majestic image.  
It's one of the earliest female images of God.  
The idea being that as a mother eagle spreads her wings  
to carry young eaglets aloft teaching them to fly,  
so God embraces the people Israel leading them to freedom,  
teaching them who and whose they are.

This vivid passage comes at a critical juncture in the Exodus story.

God has indeed heard their cries and brought them across the Red Sea out of Egypt.

They're only about three months into the journey,  
and people are already getting cranky.

You can almost hear the whining from the backseat, "Are we there yet?"

They question God's beneficence,  
wondering if they'd been better off staying enslaved back in Egypt.

But God, as a mother (or being Father's Day, maybe even a papa eagle),  
gives the food and drink they need –  
manna from heaven and water from a rock –  
strengthening them for the journey.

This is where we are by the time the passage read today opens.

It says they've just journeyed from Rephidim,  
(the place where their collective patience begins to wear thin),  
and about to enter the Sinai wilderness.

In the next chapter, Moses goes back up the mountain  
to receive the Ten Commandments.

But for now they're, well, poised in this *liminal* space – this threshold  
between where they've been and where they're about to go.

And it is here that God claims them as a mother eagle flying graciously  
with outstretched wings, ready to catch the eaglets learning to fly.  
Whatever ill winds may blow, the steady mother eagle is there.

So this, God tells Moses to tell the people,  
is the way it shall be.

The people are only to obey God's voice and keep the covenant.  
And the people respond, "This we will do."

I imagine most of them meant it, there in the moment.

But it doesn't take long to realize that it's easier said than done.

Within a few chapters they forget God's promise about the mother eagle,  
and are melting down jewelry for a golden calf.

The people Israel weren't perfect, but as human as the rest of us.  
Yet God was both steady and soaring,  
eager to bring them home to Godself.  
We know from scripture that they did, in time –  
not as quickly as they hoped –  
but in time they reached the Promised Land.

We mentioned at yesterday's Juneteenth service how this Exodus story  
of divine liberation inspired so many enslaved persons.  
Harriet Tubman, who fled to freedom and then, as a 'conductor' on the  
Underground Railroad, returned to help free others,  
has been called a "Female Moses".  
We may never know exactly where all her courage, compassion, and  
confidence come from,  
but you have to think it must have something to do with  
a sense of being carried  
by something greater than oneself.

In our own modest way, each of us individually and collectively as a  
parish, is on a journey.  
You may have heard me say, especially during the worst of COVID,  
that we're in a *liminal* space,  
a threshold,  
betwixt and between one way of being  
without knowing exactly what we're becoming.

Well, here we are. This is my last 8:00 service with you as rector.  
Next Sunday, at the combined 9:30 service,  
is my last Sunday here, period.  
We all are, in our own ways, entering a time of transition and upheaval.

Knowing and loving this parish as I do,  
I trust you'll come together and support one another through it all.

I ask you to be gentle with yourselves, and with your parish leaders and staff, giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Remember, you're in a *liminal* space.

It will feel uncertain and unmoored,  
and exciting sometimes too.

Embrace the possibilities.

Take on a new role – try something you've not done before.

God knows you're needed and, I believe, you'll be appreciated.

Go on, take even a baby-step into the threshold.

You're not traveling alone.

*Carry them, the precious people of this parish, O Lord,  
on eagle's wings,  
and bring them to yourself.*

AMEN.