



# Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

Scottish Charity No. SC006973

**Reading** Deuteronomy 32:1-18.

## **Sermon: 19 July 2009**

Have you ever had the feeling that you are falling down a cliff, and there is no one to catch you when you hit the ground? That your whole life is falling apart, but you are totally alone? As if even God has forgotten all about you?

*If you have ever felt that way, or you are experiencing something similar at this very moment, I can assure you of one thing – you are not alone. It is characteristic of the time we live in that people feel isolated when they have difficult situations to handle. But feelings of desperation and loneliness have been part of humankind forever.*

The people who lived in Old Testament times also sometimes felt this way. We read about this in Deuteronomy 32. The people of Israel time and again felt so lonely, so forsaken by God, that they made themselves other gods, gods that they could see. But God wanted them to understand that even though they cannot see him, He is always there. And He explained this to them by means of a metaphor: In Deuteronomy 32:11 we read: *Like an eagle teaching its young to fly, catching them safely on its spreading wings, the Lord kept Israel from falling.*

In other words, God takes care of his children, like an eagle that teaches its young to fly.

Eagles are well known for the way they tend to their young. As most of you probably know, eagles build their nests high up in cliffs or mountains. But something which is not as widely known, is the way in which an eagle teaches its young to fly: When the eaglets are old enough to learn how to fly, the mother literally kicks them out of the nest! And while they fall down to the ground, they realize that they need to flap their wings.

But the eagle is not really as merciless as it seems. The moment after she kicked her babies out of the nest, she also flies out, and hovers above them. And the moment she sees they get too tired, that they cannot make it on their own anymore, she flies in beneath them, opens her big wings, catches her babies on her wings, and takes them back to the nest. Isn't this fantastic?

But the flying lessons don't stop here. After this first lesson, the mother eagle time and again kicks her young out of the nest – in order to get their wings strong enough to fly on their own. Even though the first few flying lessons must be terribly traumatic for the eaglets, they just have to get through it, because that is the only way they will ever be able to fly solo.

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But now you might think that is all very interesting, but what does it have to do with *me*? Well, just like God took care of his people in Old Testament times, he still takes care of us

today. He is with us every single moment of our lives; from the day we are born until the day we close our eyes for the very last time. This is the case when it is easy for us to feel his presence in our lives, but it is also true in those times when we feel absolutely alone.

And how do we know that? God showed it to us. He doesn't make empty promises. He promised Israel that He would take care of them, and He did. Where He was supposed to kill every single Israelite – according to Old Testament law – because of their unfaithfulness, He decided to rather send his son to suffer on the cross for everyone. Even for all of us too. But even that was not enough for God. He decided to send his Holy Spirit to stay with every single believer, so that we really never have to be on our own.

And that brings us back to the metaphor of the eagle. Even though those baby eagles must *feel* totally alone when they fall down from that cliff, we *know* that in fact they are not alone at all. Their mother is right above them and she watches them with eagle eyes! She will never allow one of her young to fall right to the ground and die. Furthermore, we know that there is a *reason* why the mother eagle kicked her babies out of the nest in the first place – she didn't do it for pleasure or something – she did it because she *had* to, because otherwise they would never have become what they were made to be. Eagles can only be eagles if they can fly... And all of this is true, even if the young eaglets don't realize this from the start.

The same thing happens with us. Sometimes we feel exactly the same as the baby eagles – as if we are falling down a cliff at a tremendous speed, and there is absolutely no one to catch us before we hit the ground.

These feelings of godforsakenness might have something to do with the time and world we live in. People do not have time for each other anymore. Some people are so busy climbing the ladder of success, that they don't even realize how many other people they hurt on their way to the top. Then there are other people, who struggle so hard just to survive, that they just can't gather up enough energy to spend on the people around them. It is characteristic of our time that lots of people don't have any hope for the future.

But do you know what? We must not allow the rest of the world to drag us down and make us part of such a negative frame of mind, because the reality of the matter is: *We are not alone!*

God is with every one of his children every moment of every day. We just have to believe it. It depends on ourselves if we are going to recognize the presence of God in our lives, or whether we are going to pretend that He doesn't exist. We can give ourselves over to that feelings of hopelessness, give up, and as a matter of speaking, jump down a cliff with open eyes. *Or* we can believe that God knows what He is doing. That He watches us with eagle eyes, and that He will, when He sees that we just cannot go on like we are at the moment, bring an end to our suffering.

It would have been wonderful if all of us only had to endure tribulation once, and thereafter could live a happy and easy life. But this is not how life works. We live in a broken world. We face difficult situations time and again: bad health, people who hurt or disappoint us, loved ones who die...

But just as the wings of those baby eagles will never grow strong enough to fly after one flying lesson alone, so our wings of faith will grow stronger and stronger with every difficult situation we have to face. Because it is faith alone that gets us through dark times.

We must just *believe* that God will never place us in situations we cannot handle. And that He will give us the strength to do whatever is expected of us – even though this sometimes is very difficult. And we must *believe* that God has a plan with our lives. We must *believe* that God will answer our prayers, but that He will do this in his time and his way. Because He knows what is best for us. He can see the bigger picture.

So – next time you feel as if you lost control over your life, as if everything is just getting too much to handle – remember: God *is* there. If an eagle – an *animal* – will not allow one of its young to hit the ground after it has fallen down a cliff – just think how much better God will take care of his children...

Believe that God is in charge of your life, so that you can see every tribulation as an opportunity to grow in faith, as an opportunity to set an example to the rest of the world of how a child of God can handle difficult situations. Believe that God will never leave you alone, that He knows how much you can handle and that He has a plan with your life here on earth, so that you can be like an eagle – an eagle that can easily fly higher and higher, because the Holy Spirit is the wind beneath your wings, until it will also become easier for you to see the bigger picture.

May God grant all of us the power to go through life with eyes as sharp as those of an eagle, so that we can see what he expects of us; with arms as swift as an eagle's wings, so that we can make a difference in the world around us; and with legs as strong as an eagle's claws, so that we can have a grip on our lives – always.

May you, when you have to face difficult circumstances in the future, not fall, but fly, because you know, you are never alone.

**Amen**

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## **Readings for the week**

### **Deuteronomy 32:11**

The people who lived in Old Testament times felt at times neglected by God. We read all about this in Deuteronomy 32. The people of Israel felt lonely and forsaken by God. In this passage it becomes clear that although they cannot see him, He is always with them. He is like an eagle “that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.” In other words God is telling them that he will always take care of them. For us this also means a lot. It is comforting to know we also have a merciful God who is like a mother eagle flying beneath us when we are in a crisis to catch us when we fall.