

6.27.2021 Fourth Sunday after Trinity (Genesis 12:1-9)

I heard a story about a wounded eagle who was rescued by a kind farmer. The farmer found the bird in one of his fields, took him home, tended to his wounds, and then placed him outside in the barnyard to recover. Oddly enough, the young eagle soon adapted to the habits of the barnyard chickens. He learned to walk and even cluck like chicken. He learned to drink from a trough and peck the dirt for food, and as the years passed the eagle grew to be very comfortable in his new life on the ground.

Then one day, one of the farmer's friends spotted the eagle and asked, "Why in the world is that eagle acting like a chicken?" The farmer told him what had happened, yet the man couldn't accept the situation, and said, "It's just not right, God made that bird to soar in the heavens, not to scavenge in the barnyard!" So he picked up the unsuspecting eagle, climbed up onto a nearby fencepost, and tossed him into the air, but the confused bird just fell back to earth and scurried off in search of his feathered friends. Unfazed, the man again grabbed the eagle, and this time climbed to the top of the barn. As he heaved him off the roof, the bird made a few halfhearted squawks and flaps before falling into a bale of hay, and after shaking his head a few times, the eagle made himself comfortable and began mindlessly pecking at pieces of straw.

The farmer's friend went home that night dejected, and could hardly sleep as he remembered the sight of those powerful talons caked with barnyard mud. He couldn't stand the thought, and so the very next day he headed back to the farm for another try. This time he carried the eagle to the top of a nearby mountain where the sky unfolded into a limitless horizon. The man looked into the eagle's eyes and said, "You weren't made to live like a chicken. You were born to fly." The man then pointed the eagle into the brilliant light of the setting sun, and powerfully heaved the bird into the sky. This time the eagle opened its wings, caught the updraft rising from the valley, and disappeared into the clouds of heaven.

God has revealed Himself to us as a God who challenges people. He calls us to step out of our comfort zone and into His joyful service. When we think about someone like Noah, a farmer, who was called by God to build an ark in a place where it never rained, or Moses, a shepherd, who was sent by God to

confront Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt, or Peter, an uneducated fisherman, who was inspired by God to preach a sermon that led to the conversion of 3,000 people on the day of Pentecost, or the Blessed Virgin Mary, a teenage girl, who gave birth to the Son of God; when we consider these examples and countless more, what we find is that God challenges people to be who He created them to be. Like the farmer's friend who saw the eagle and immediately knew that it wasn't created to scratch and peck in a barnyard, God sees us, people He "*fearfully and wonderfully*" (Psalm 139:14) made in His own image and likeness, and knows that we weren't made to act like chickens.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning we read about Abram, who would later be known as Abraham, a man God called, a man God challenged to leave the familiar and the comfortable, by saying to him, "*Leave your country, your kindred, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you*" (Genesis 12:1 BSB). The passage tells us that Abram was seventy-five years old when he received this call. He was living where he was born and raised, with his wealthy father and his family. Imagine how difficult it would be at seventy-five, to pack up bits and pieces of your comfortable life, to leave your home, extended family, and close friends to journey to "*a land that I will show you.*" Notice, God didn't even tell Abram where he was headed, He simply promised, "*I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing*" (Genesis 12:2).

Abram was a man of great faith. He not only believed in God, he "*believed God*" (Romans 4:3). He believed that where God guides, He provides, and so Abram left the security of his comfort zone, not knowing where he was going, but certain that God was worth any sacrifice, and his example reminds us of these words from our New Testament lesson, in which Jesus said, "*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it*" (Matthew 10:39). In Abram we see that losing your life doesn't necessarily mean martyrdom. To lose your life for our Lord often means sacrificing, offering up, leaving behind what is comfortable and familiar in order to respond to God's call.

In the same way that Noah (the farmer), Moses (the shepherd), Peter (the uneducated fishermen), Mary (the teenage mother of God), and Abraham (the

father of faith) all left the security of their comfort zone, we are called by God to lay down what feels safe and comfortable to the end that we may take up our cross daily to follow Him (Matthew 10:38; Luke 9:23). In doing so, we lose our life for the sake of our Lord, and find our true God-given identity.

I'll leave you with this thought: A healthy eagle in a barnyard, that clucks like a chicken and pecks the dirt for food, would be a strange, and even sad sight, because eagles are made to fly. In a similar way, a healthy Christian, who refuses to step outside the security of their comfort zone is a strange and sad sight, because we were made for greater things. We were made to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We were made to love our neighbor as ourself. We were made to take up our cross daily, and lose our life for the sake of our Lord. These things won't be accomplished by those who huddle together in the barnyard, who scratch and peck for comfortable crumbs of faith. These things will only be accomplished by those who, by the grace of God, respond to our Lord's call, His challenge to climb the mountain with Him, to open our wings and fly.