

**My Sermon from Sunday June 20, 2021,**  
**'National Indigenous Peoples' Day of Prayer' ~**

***"On Eagles' Wings"***

(Note to Readers: At the beginning of my sermon, Cantor **Patsy Towell** sang the refrain from the beautiful hymn "*On Eagles' Wings*" Psalm 91)

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

*May God always hold us in the palm  
of God's hand. Amen.*

I am holding an Eagle Feather with multi-coloured ribbons tied on the bottom. This eagle feather was a gift to me from parishioner **Eva Kakepetum**, who passed away on January 10th of this year. I treat this symbol with the respect it deserves and I keep it wrapped in fabric designed by Eva's late husband, the artist **Abe Kakepetum**, and stored carefully in my church office.

The Eagle is accorded the highest respect by Indigenous peoples. The Eagle is considered the messenger of the Creator, therefore its feathers are held in high regard. Thus, the eagle feather is the link between the People and the Creator. The eagle is considered sacred because it flies so high ~ flies closest to the Creator. The eagle symbolizes respect, honour, strength, courage and wisdom. In Alberta, eagle feathers, like the Bible, can be used for swearing oaths.

This is the first time that I have taken out this eagle feather since Eva gave it to me last year.

When we think about soaring, we think about eagles. They can have a wingspan of up to 2 metres and up to 7,000 feathers that allow the eagle to rise thousands of feet into the air and make it look easy.

I love to see eagles soaring up high around *One Island Lake* and then coming down to perch on the tip of a white pine. Eagles' nests are huge and bald eagles return to the same nest year after year. It is not the eagle's ability to fly that takes it higher and higher but its ability to catch the warm updrafts under its outstretched wings.

Eagles have lived in Israel for centuries. The prophet Isaiah must have watched eagles soar over Israel as he used them as a metaphor for our relationship with God.

*Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:31)*

I have a plaque of this Bible verse in my office and you (all of St. Paul's) gave it to me when I was collated as an Archdeacon over a decade ago.



It is not our strength that will carry us higher and farther, but the Lord's. Our responsibility is to spread our wings of faith and let God's strength take us where we never could go on our own. If you are feeling weak and exhausted from whatever task lies before you, turn your hope to the Lord and let God's strength raise you up.



Many of the prophets in the Bible, prophets such as Moses, Elisha, Isaiah, and Jeremiah were reluctant to be messengers for God because of a variety of real issues such as a speech impediment, youth, and feelings of inadequacy, yet God raised them up.

They soared by faith and set their sights on heights they never could have reached without God's help.

There is a well-known metaphor that mother eagles push their eaglets out of the nest to teach them to fly. However, this is probably not true as all the research I read this past week about teaching eagles to fly concludes that the eaglets leave the nest on their own and fly on their own. I believe this is how God operates. God doesn't throw us into the deep end and say 'sink or swim.' God soars and encourages us to leave the nest and soar also, but he doesn't push us. God encouraged Moses and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Peter, but they still had free will.

One of my favourite verses in the Bible is about eagles, from Psalm 103:5 ~

*Who (the Lord) satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

For thousands of years, humanity has been inspired by eagles. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Book of Samuel, Saul and Jonathan have this comparison made about them:

*Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.* (2 Samuel 1:23)

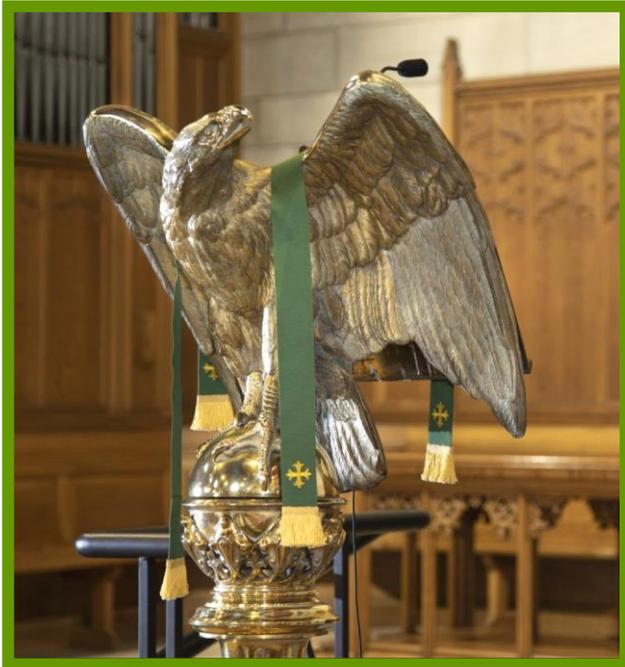
God lifts us up and the eagle metaphor is used for God. How God carries us and protects us. In our prayers, we pray that God will keep us safe under the shelter of his holy wings.

Here's a verse from Exodus 19:4 ~ *You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*

The prophet Ezekiel has a vision of a chariot with 4 living creatures in it. Each had a different face ~ human, lion, ox, and eagle. Christians use these symbols for the 4 Gospels: Matthew ~ the human; Mark ~ the lion; Luke ~ the ox; and John ~ the eagle. St. John



wrote in the most detail about the divinity of Christ. John had the clarity of vision which reminds us of the visual acuity of the eagle. In *St. Mark's Anglican Church* in Rosslyn, there is a stained glass window of St. Mark and his foot is on a lion. On the ceiling of our sanctuary at St. Paul's, the 4 images from Ezekiel's vision are all there.



The eagle is often used in our Anglican churches as part of the lectern, from which the lessons are read during worship. The Bible is rested on the eagle's outstretched wings or on its back. There is a powerful-looking eagle on the front of the lectern at *Gathering Table* (formerly *St. John's*). Our St. Paul's lectern does not have an eagle but does have some brass detail that looks like the wings of an eagle.

Why on a lectern from where the Bible is read during worship? There are several reasons. The eagles fly the highest of all the birds, and can therefore get the closest to heaven. Another theory is that eagles were believed by ancient peoples to be able to look directly at the sun without harming their eyes. We believe that Christians are able to look at the Bible, the Word of God, and be equally unharmed.

Today, I am holding an **eagle feather** and I am reminded of the promises of God to raise us up. I am reminded of the unity in Christ between indigenous peoples and settlers. I am connected with our fathers, our grandfathers, and all the men who have profoundly been there for us, whether for a lifetime or for a significant period of time.

On this **Father's Day** and on this **National Indigenous Day of Prayer**, we pray that God will raise us up and help us to soar to fulfil our dreams ~ our dreams for ourselves, our families, and our country. **Amen.**

(Note to Readers: At the end of my sermon, Cantor **Patsy Towell** sang the "On Eagles' Wings" refrain once again.)

*Archdeacon Deborah+*

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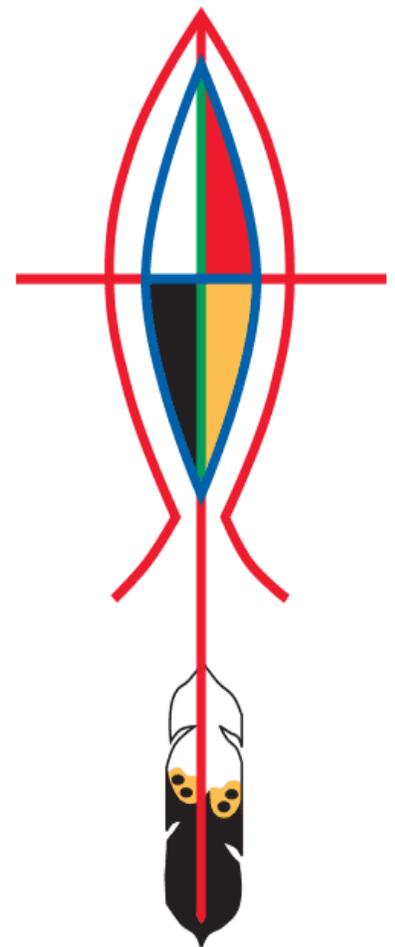
Meaning of the ACIP logo (*Anglican Council on Indigenous Peoples*) ~

We begin every Sunday morning service with a slide that states that:

*"We are worshipping on Robinson-Superior Treaty (1850) Territory, the traditional territory of the Anishnaabeg."*

The slide includes the logo for the *Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples (ACIP)*. In words from the ACIP, here is the meaning of the logo:

The **fish** at the centre of the logo is formed by the overlap of two circles — or two traditions — coming together, the Aboriginal tradition and the European tradition.



The point where they come together is where Christ is to be found, represented by both the **cross** and the **fish** (which also contains the form of the Greek letters, **Alpha** and **Omega**).

The **cross** is surrounded by the **four colours** of the four peoples of the world. Our vision is of all races coming together.

The **fish** and the **cross** also contain within them the initials of the *Anglican Council of Indigenous Peoples*.

The **eagle** has always been a strong image for Aboriginal peoples. The **eagle feather** attached to the **cross** comes from Isaiah 40:31 — *“But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”* If people can come together, they will fly.

The **green** in the logo represents our Mother Earth, and the **blue** the waters of the oceans that surround the continents.

**Blue** is also the colour of hope for Aboriginal people. When we are watching for good weather to come, we look for the first signs of blue in the sky.

**Green** is also the symbol of new growth.

**Red** is the colour of the Aboriginal peoples.