

WITH WINGS LIKE EAGLES

Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-29

A sermon preached by the Rev. Theodore S. Atkinson,
Pastor, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA

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"Those who wait on 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

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

One thing that I learned in Boy Scouts - Look at nature carefully! ~~On hikes our leaders~~ pointed out things I'd miss. ~~"Look at that bird sitting up there in the tree. It's a red tailed hawk."~~ ^{Big blue bird} We spent weekends at Camp Rodney on the Chesapeake in the bitter cold of winter. In the morning we'd go into the woods and track animals in the snow. We'd pour plaster of Paris into the tracks and make casts used to teach younger boys how to identify animal tracks. At night we'd go outside and identify constellations and learn the names of some of the stars. The highlight of my scouting career was going in 1958 to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. I was amazed at the blueness of the morning sky far away from the pollution of Delaware - and the brilliance of the stars at night. Scouting helped me appreciate nature and see God in nature.

I thought of the Boy Scouts when I read our Old Testament Lesson. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah obviously had the keen eye of a Boy Scout with an appreciation for the wonders of nature. Notice some of the things he talks about in our Old Testament lesson, things that ^{are familiar with} scouts ~~learn to notice~~. Every scout learns about tents. Isaiah compares the heavens above to a tent. The Lord "stretches out the heavens and spreads them like a tent to live in."^{much of that we next time you camp out!} He beckons us to look up at the stars. "Lift up your eyes on high and see." When I went to Philmont we didn't have tents. Instead we attached two ponchos together and stretched them out on a rope so both ends were open. I'd lie awake at night trying to count the stars. I never got very far before falling asleep. Isaiah tells us that God knows how many stars there are. He has a name for every star and planet. ^{Isaiah says} And though we are as small as grasshoppers in the sight of the Lord, he knows each of us by name.

Isaiah also observed the flight of eagles. His observation prompted him to make one of the most comforting promises in all of scripture. Eagles have long, broad wings and tails. They

can glide great distances, effortlessly, without flapping their wings. Isaiah tells us that those who wait upon the Lord - no matter how old, no matter how weak - will renew their strength and mount up on wings like eagles. ^{That promise takes on special meaning as we grow older and as we watch parents} Nothing is sadder than watching a parent grow old and feeble. It was like yesterday we remember how dad played out in the backyard with us. Running with us. Walking with us. But the years go by so quickly. Dad grows old. He begins to slow down. He stumbles. He falls. He grows weak. But Isaiah says, "The Lord gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. And those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength and they shall mount up with wings like eagles." What a wonderful promise.

Isaiah reminds us that our contemplation of nature is meant to lead us to God. When we look up at the stars Isaiah asks, "Who created these?" Isaiah wants our appreciation of nature to lead us to a holy reverence in the presence of God. One of the Scout laws is, "A Scout is reverent." My Scout leaders took reverence seriously. Don't get me wrong. No one had funnier stories and could play better pranks than our pipe-smoking Irish scout master, Joe McGlocklen, whose laughter constantly shook the Scout cabin. But Joe wouldn't tolerate taking the Lord's name in vain. And when we camped out on the weekend he made sure we always had a worship service. Joe was a Catholic so he'd get all the Catholic boys up early on Sunday morning and take them to mass in Elkton. Protestants boys got to sleep in. But we always had a simple worship service before breakfast. One of our leaders ^{when we were at Camp Robinson} was a ^{Mr. Myers} man from my church. He always led the Protestant service right there in the Scout cabin. He opened with prayer, he led us in singing Sunday School songs that we all knew by heart, he read Scripture and gave a sermon. He gave very good sermons, more interesting than our pastor and a lot shorter. We had lots of fun in scouts but we never forgot that a scout is reverent.

The Scout Law affirms that a scout is helpful, friendly, courteous, kind. Those words describe very well another of my scout leaders. When I got my Star rank, my dad was invited to come forward to pin the medal on my uniform. ^{It} Dad was already suffering from Alzheimers and he became confused. He came forward, took the pin and didn't know what to do with it. He just stood there grinning for what seemed forever. Someone in the audience laughed. I was terribly

embarrassed, angry and humiliated. Then, one of our leaders, Mr. Flychute, came forward and gently took the pin from my father with a smile. He pinned the medal on me, shook hands with me and then congratulated my dad and led him back to his seat. Afterward Mr. Flychute spoke to me privately. He said he was very sorry for the confusion. ^{He always asked about my dad.} He cared about me as a person. He demonstrated that a scout is helpful, friendly, courteous, and kind.

A scout is also brave and clean. The Boy Scout movement which is 90 years old this year in America was an outgrowth of a movement that took place in the 19th century called *muscular Christianity*. ^{The Rev. Charles Kingsley. Socialist. Brought Gospel to workers. Environmentalist. The influential man like Baden-Powell} Many men at the turn of the last century thought Christianity was for women and children, not for men. But men like ^{howel} Robert ^{in England} Baden-Powell, Dan Beard and Ernest Seton ^{U.S.} Thompson thought otherwise. They believed in a muscular Christianity. They set out to demonstrate that ^{who tried to build a person} real men could also be real Christians. And although the Boy Scout movement is not Christian *per se* (it welcomes boys of all religious convictions), it grew out of the *muscular Christianity* movement which portrayed Jesus as a ^{real men} real man, an outdoorsmen who often slept outside, who observed the lilies of the field and the birds of the air and found lessons about God in nature. Muscular Christianity challenged young people to become morally and spiritually strong as well as physically fit.

The founder of the Boy Scouts was an Englishman, Lord Baden-Powell. Lord Baden-Powell was very familiar with the shortness of life which the prophet Isaiah compares to the life of a plant when he wrote, "Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble." Lord Baden-Powell knew that life goes by so quickly and how important it is to live and die well. Towards the end of his life in 1941 he prepared a farewell message to his Scouts for publication after his death. I conclude my sermon with his farewell message.

"Dear Scouts - if you have ever seen the play 'Peter Pan' you will remember how the pirate chief was always making his dying speech because he was afraid that possibly, when the time came for him to die, he might not have time to get it off his chest. It is much the same with me, and so, although I am not at this moment dying, I shall be doing so one of these days and I

want to send you a parting word of goodbye. Remember, it is the last time you will ever hear from me, so think it over. I have had a most happy life and I want each one of you to have a happy life too.

I believe that God put us in this jolly world to be happy and enjoy life. Happiness does not come from being rich, nor merely being successful in your career, nor by self-indulgence. One step towards happiness is to make yourself healthy and strong while you are a boy, so that you can be useful and so you can enjoy life when you are a man. Nature study will show you how full of beautiful and wonderful things God has made the world for you to enjoy. Be contented with what you have got and make the best of it. Look on the bright side of things instead of the gloomy one.

But the real way to get happiness is by giving out happiness to other people. Try and leave this world a little better than you found it and when your turn comes to die, you can die happy in feeling that at any rate you have not wasted your time but have done your best. 'Be Prepared' is the way, to live happy and to die happy - stick to your Scout Promise always--even after you have ceased to be a boy - and God help you to do it.

Your friend, Baden-Powell"

Every Christian can say Amen to that.

Amen.

*Most holy God,
the earth is filled with your glory,
and in your presence angels stand in awe.
Enlarge our vision,
that we may recognize your power at work in your Son
and join the apostles and prophets as heralds of your saving word.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God forever and ever. Amen.*