

Don't Be A Prairie Chicken
Message for Graduation/Confirmation Sunday
June 3, 2018
North East United Methodist Church
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

One day a prairie chicken...



...found an egg and sat on it until it hatched. Unbeknownst to the prairie chicken, the egg was an eagle egg, abandoned for some reason. That's how an eagle came to be born into a family of prairie chickens.



While the eagle is the greatest of all birds, soaring above the heights with grace and ease, the prairie chicken doesn't even know how to fly. In fact, prairie chickens are so lowly that they eat garbage.

Predictably, the little eagle, being raised in a family of prairie chickens, thought he was a prairie chicken. He walked around, ate garbage, and clucked like a prairie chicken.

One day he looked up to see a majestic bald eagle soar through the air, dipping and turning.



When he asked his family what it was, they responded, “It’s an eagle. But you could never be like that because you are just a prairie chicken.” Then they returned to pecking the garbage.

The eagle spent his whole life looking up at eagles, longing to join them among the clouds. It never once occurred to him to lift his wings and try to fly. The eagle died thinking he was just a prairie chicken.



You were born to fly.



But some think and act like prairie chickens because the world has told them that is what they are.

The Bible teaches that God created us, each of you, “*a little lower than the angels.*”

When you look in the mirror do you see the eagle God created you to be? Do you recognize what Isaiah recognized – that “***The LORD chose me and gave me a name before I was born. He made my words pierce like a sharp sword or a pointed arrow; he kept me safely hidden in the palm of his hand. The LORD said to me, ‘Israel, you are my servant; and because of you I will be highly honored’***” (Isaiah 49:1-3).

Or do you see a prairie chicken? One unable to soar with the eagles?

If you are like many of us, there have been times throughout your life that you have realized that you are special and capable of great things and other times when you have felt insignificant and small. We can see in the prophet Isaiah both these moments. First, Isaiah explains to the people that God called him before he was born...that God named him when he was in his mother’s womb...that God hid him and protected him...that he is special indeed...in fact, he is so special that God said through him God would be glorified. But then the doubting, the hurting, the small side of Isaiah comes out and he says,



“I’m completely worn out; my time has been wasted” (Isaiah 49:4).

Here, Isaiah expresses the feeling that he has wasted his time...that his strength has brought no results for the Lord...that his labors have been in vain...that he has spent his strength on vanity...on selfish pursuits...he feels like he is not getting anywhere...not making any difference...people have ignored him...his words have gone unheard...he is simply a prairie chicken...

But unlike the prairie chicken in our story, Isaiah remembers something...he remembers something awfully important...he says,



“But I did it for the LORD God, and he will reward me” (Isaiah 49:4). Another translation states, *“Yet, surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.”*

Today, those of you being confirmed are making a commitment to fly...a commitment to remember...to accept the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ for yourselves...affirming the faith of the church as found in the Apostle’s Creed...

In a few moments, as a representative of Christ, I will lay hands upon you and pray, *“The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ”*...you may, as we say in the Chrysalis community...



...Fly With Christ!

In confirmation, we *“turn away from sin, from selfishness, from everything that oppresses us and others, from violence and evil.”* We spread our wings...We become citizens of Christ’s new order. Confirmation helps us *“name the powers from which we turn and the evil that we commit ourselves to oppose.”* We should no longer blend in with all those pecking at the ground around us...but stand out...reaching toward the skies...helping others rise above their surroundings...We are *“called to be Christians”* and we are *“called to be in ministry to others.”* We are called to be part of a church.

Confirmation is only one step on our journey of faith. And unlike baptism it is a repeatable rite... Throughout our lives, there will be times we need to recommit to our faith...we will find ourselves walking along the ground, held down by those around us, by our circumstances, failing to fly, to be all God has called us to be...And in those moments we will need to cry out to God, confess our sin, seek His forgiveness and strength, and once more spread our wings...

You must remember...this day...the commitment you make can only be lived out through Christ...On your own strength, you can do nothing!

It reminds me of a story of the donkey that carried Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and what happened with that donkey the next day.



The donkey awakened, his mind still savoring the afterglow of the most exciting day of his life. Never before had he felt such a rush of pleasure and pride.

He walked into town and found a group of people by the well. "I'll show myself to them," he thought.

But they didn't notice him. They went on drawing their water and paid him no mind.

"Throw your cloaks down," he said crossly. "Don't you know who I am?"

They just looked at him in amazement. Someone slapped him across the tail and ordered him to move.

"Miserable heathens!" he muttered to himself. "I'll just go to the market where the good people are. They will remember me."

But the same thing happened. No one paid any attention to the donkey as he strutted down the main street in front of the market place.



“The palm branches! Where are the palm branches!” he shouted. “Yesterday, you threw palm branches!”

Hurt and confused, the donkey returned home to his mother.



“Foolish child,” she said gently. “Don’t you realize that without him, you are just an ordinary donkey?”

“Don’t you realize that without him, you are just an ordinary donkey?”

Just like the donkey... Without Christ, all our best efforts, Isaiah tells us, are like “*filthy rags*” and amount to nothing.

Isaiah cries out, “***I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.***” How does God respond to Isaiah’s statement of frustration and of faith?

God replies, “***I have placed you here as a light for other nations; you must take my saving power to everyone on earth... I am the holy LORD God...the one who rescues you...Now this is what I promise: Kings and rulers will honor you by kneeling at your feet. You can trust me! I am your LORD, the holy God of Israel, and you are my chosen ones.***”

God tells Isaiah that he will do great things...in fact, he will do greater things than he has ever dreamed of or thought possible...not only will he help to “*raise up the tribes of Jacob,*” preaching to them in exile and bringing them together back to the land they were taken out of...but he will help God’s light shine to the ends of the earth...

Here Isaiah feels as if his strength has been spent for nothing and for vanity...yet, God says you will take my light to the ends of the earth...you will do these greater things because I go with you...for with me...with God...you are no longer ordinary...you can soar...

Jesus told His disciples before He left,

GREATER THINGS

*...and they will do even greater things
than these... John 14:12*

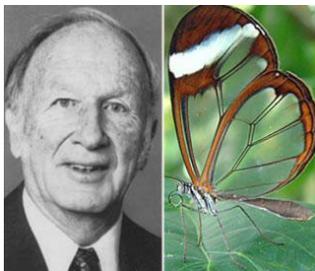
“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these” ...

Jesus said that we would do greater things than He did. We would help take the Word about Him, about His salvation, about His love beyond the realm of where He could as a human being. He never went more than a hundred miles from His home, yet His message has spread across the globe through people like you and I.

Jesus was a great light...but all of us together, sharing His message of love...counting on Him...allowing His light to shine through us in our schools, our community, our churches, our workplace, is an even greater light.

Like Isaiah, God has plans for you that go beyond anything you could imagine...God created you to soar...to send ripples forward through time impacting countless lives, impacting eternity.

In each of your Agape Bags, I have placed a book called The Butterfly Effect by Andy Andrews. In that book, Andrews explains how in 1963, Edward Lorenz presented a hypothesis to the New York Academy of Science.



His theory was: A butterfly could flap its wings and set molecules of air in motion which would move other molecules of air, in turn moving more molecules of air – eventually capable of starting a hurricane on the other side of the planet.

He was literally laughed out of the conference.

More than thirty years later it was determined that the butterfly effect theory was authentic, accurate and viable and was accorded the status of a “law” – The Law of Sensitive Dependence Upon Initial Conditions

This “law” applies to each of us...to each of you...

The wisest man who ever lived, King Solomon, told us, ***“Plant your seed in the morning and keep busy all afternoon, for you don’t know if profit will come from one activity or another—or maybe both”*** (Ecclesiastes 11:6, MSG).

What types of seed will you sow? Here in the morning of your life when you are young? Later in the evening of your life when you are old? What types of seeds will you plant? Will they be seeds of gossip, judgment, unforgiveness, selfishness, hatred, fear, distrust? Will they be seeds that uplift, forgive, serve others, love, spread courage and hope?

Matthew 25: 34-40 - *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’*

“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

We will one day understand the effect our actions had on countless lives...the effect our actions had on the world...on the earth on which we walk...We will understand the effect our actions had, both good and bad...the impact we had on the people we knew as well as many we never met.

In his book, Andrews shares about a time when ABC News honored a man as “Person of the Week.” On April 2, 2004, the “Person of the Week” was Norman Borlaug. Who was Norman Borlaug?



Norman Borlaug, in the early 1940’s hybridized high yield disease resistant corn and wheat for hot and arid climates.

What this means is that from the dust bowl of Western Africa to our own desert, to South

and Central America, across Siberia, Europe, and Asia...corn and wheat grew where it had never grown before...

It had been calculated that because of his work more than two billion lives had been saved from famine...

Two billion lives...

But Andy Andrews questions that perhaps the person who saved the two billion lives wasn't Norman Borlaug, but Henry Wallace...



Henry Wallace was the Vice-President of the United States under Franklin Roosevelt...before Wallace was Vice-President, he was the former Secretary of Agriculture and as Vice-President created a station in Mexico whose sole purpose was to hybridize corn and wheat for arid climates...and he hired a young man to run it...Norman Borlaug...

But perhaps, Andrews writes, it was George Washington Carver who saved the two billion lives...



When Carver was nineteen years old, studying at Iowa State University, he mentored a young six-year old boy, son of his professor, teaching him and giving him a love for plants and a vision for what they could do for humanity...that young boy was Henry Wallace...

But perhaps it was a simple farmer from Diamond, Missouri who saved the two billion lives...



His name was Moses...and living in a slave state but not believing in slavery made him a target...One night raiders attacked Moses' farm, dragging off a young woman named Mary Washington and her infant son, George.

Moses traveled for days to meet the bandits and traded his only horse for a burlap bag containing the infant child...the mother had been killed...

He walked the many days home, carrying the infant in his arms, and Moses and his wife, Susan, adopted the child, giving him their family name...Carver

George Washington Carver grew up and mentored a young boy, Henry Wallace...who grew up with a love for growing things and built a station in Mexico to hybridize corn and wheat...and put a young Norman Borlaug in charge...

Who was responsible for the two billion lives that were saved? Borlaug, Wallace, Carver...Moses, the farmer from Diamond, Missouri?

Andrews writes, ***“There are generations yet unborn whose very lives will be shifted and shaped by the moves you make and the actions you take today. And tomorrow. And the next day. And the next. Every Single Thing You Do Matters.”***

God says through the prophet Jeremiah, ***“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”***

Jesus said, ***“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these” ...***

Don't accept the life that so many around you will choose...status quo...to fit in...to feed on the garbage of this world...Instead soar...and remember that God will, as Paul writes in Ephesians,



“...do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

You may not see the results of your efforts, but if you are faithful, if you stay connected, walking with Christ, you will produce fruit that will last...God will do more than you can dream or imagine as your actions will ripple through time impacting generations to come...Remember Paul’s words in Philippians 1:6, God promises, *“...that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”* (NIV).

Like God shouted to Isaiah, God shouts to you through His Word, *“I have placed you here as a light for other nations; you must take my saving power to everyone on earth... I am the holy LORD God...the one who rescues you...Now this is what I promise: Kings and rulers will honor you by kneeling at your feet. You can trust me! I am your LORD, the holy God of Israel, and YOU are my chosen ones.”*

Just as many throughout this congregation have chosen whom they will serve, whom they will follow, these young men and women have made a commitment to God this day...and God shouts to them and to all of us who have put our faith in Him, *“You can trust me! I am your LORD, the holy God of Israel, and YOU are my chosen ones.”*



...Now Go...Go and SOAR!