

NOTES LENTEN TALK FIFTH WEDNESDAY OF LENT
(by the Revd Dr Nigel Willis 25 March 2020)

[1] In the devotions for the Fifth Wednesday in Lent, Walter Brueggemann in his *A Way Other Than Our Own; Devotions for Lent*, (which, thanks to Fr Eben, we are working through over this Lenten season), we are asked to reflect on Isaiah 40:31.

[2] 'But those who look to the Lord will win new strength,

They will soar as on eagles' wings;

They will run and not feel faint

March on and not grow weary.'

[3] In the KJV the second line of this verse is translated as:

'They shall mount up with wings like eagles.'

[4] That phrase has resonated strongly in recent decades because it is invoked on Remembrance Day when we remember all those who have died in war especially during the great First and Second World Wars.

[5] It is perhaps appropriate that, at this time of world crisis over the coronavirus, we should remember that the world has experienced much worse crises than this and not only survived but gone on to prosper. But those of us who are alive and who survive should act with humility and due reverence for life itself.

[6] I have been privileged, many times, to see eagles soaring in the sky in the wilds of Botswana.

[7] Who can see eagles soaring without having a sense of the majesty of God? And what about our own sense of impotence of how we are limited by the forces of gravity and the design, size and shape of our otherwise beautiful bodies.

[8] As Brueggemann says, this magnificent passage in Isaiah tells us that God 'is at work, overriding despair, inviting hope, responding to our waiting, and starting the world free again, outside the regimes of weariness'.

[9] We do indeed need newer, revised, more modern translations of scripture in order to enable us better to understand what was written and said in ancient times. But, we should never forget how powerfully beautiful and descriptive the KJV is. The imagery of 'mounting up with wings like eagles' is superb inasmuch as it involves a word-play recalling both the action of the wings of an eagle and the act of climbing higher and higher in the sky. In a sense, that translation may be better. The OT is full of subtle word-plays.

[10] The beauty and the majesty of birds – and, most especially, eagles flying fanned the dreams of human beings to be able to fly. Almost certainly, without the inspiration of eagles in flight, the aeroplane would never have been invented. But, without air-travel, the coronavirus would not have travelled around the world.

[11] Over and over again, the teachings of Jesus make us aware of the potency of paradox. But few of us would want to revert to the days without travel by air. It has opened up immense possibilities for the good but also the bad.

[12] The paradox of the corona virus is that it will bring human beings closer together. We have all become more acutely aware of our shared

humanity, of how we need one another. Of how important simple joys like handshakes and hugs really are.

[13] The world will never be the same again. It will change. But how, precisely, it will change will depend on how we respond. Will we care more for each other, our planet, our environment and all other living creatures?

[14] The great prophet Isaiah gives us inspiration: 'Those who look to the Lord will win new strength.' Let us reach for the sky.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.