

Don...On Eagles' Wings  
Isaiah 40:31  
Don Cittel: December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1923-June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015  
July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2015  
Saint Paul's Lutheran Church of Irvine  
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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Don is the only parishioner I've ever served whose favorite hymn was "On Eagles' Wings" and one of the Scriptures that this hymn is based on is Isaiah 40:31: ***"but they 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 had just finished speaking a prophecy to King Hezekiah in Isaiah 39: Israel would be carried off to Babylon and go into exile...hard times were coming and it was time to prepare the heart for the Lord. These were chilling words; the true prophet of God was once again put into the position of not exactly being the bearer of good news. Life is hard, very hard...and life was going to get even harder...this is not joyful news, but downright discouraging news. Don knew about these things. You just heard me read his biography...what amazing blessings our brother in Christ knew! But does this mean he did not suffer? What filled Don's heart when he lost Edward? What did he go through when he lost Jeff? What does a man so gifted and strong for so long go through when his health betrays him? What does a loving father experience when he loses his children? Yes, Don knew many blessings, but he also knew many hardships. He knew that the words of the Lord are true: "In this world you will have tribulation..." (John 16:33).

That is, Don knew about the bigger picture. Yes, he knew joy...great joy, esp. when it came to celebrating life with his dear Sylvia! But he had a realistic grasp of life and it humbled him...it turned him into a man who relied on God. So many people think that such faith represents weakness...someone who needs a crutch, so pitiful in the eyes of the world which prides itself in self-glory and self-aggrandizement. The world doesn't "get" a man like Don. Never did and never will, but what Don knew was quite simply amazing and this dear one is the invaluable legacy he has left behind. Did you catch the part in his biography of what he conveyed to Sylvia about his faith in Jesus Christ? He had expressed his total faith in Christ's forgiveness...no strings attached and he was not about to give up on his connection to Jesus! That's why attending divine service (going to church) was a priority for Don...and this is again his true legacy! Don knew that attending divine service – getting the Sacrament; receiving the Word – was not about a social thing, a good work, a matter of spiritual pride...it was about a sinner being served by God and being kept forgiven and covered by the grace of God. Don got it. By the grace of God, He understood. What gave him the love his family speaks of? It came from the love of Jesus which overflowed in him! Don loved, because he was first loved by Jesus Christ!

And this my friends is how we get through the hard times...its experiencing the love of the Lord in the midst of trials! But it is totally insufficient to imply that this love of God is simply adequate for us to somehow "get by." By no means and we learn something further when we contemplate Don's favorite hymn. Life could be storming – producing really bad days – but Don was graced to discover that his faith was never to be reduced to some mere coping mechanism. Much to the contrary, to know the Lord makes strong even when we are weak; it is to see light in darkness; it is to have hope in the midst of despair; it is to rise up...not just maintain...but RISE UP. To know the Lord was to face the exile of sin – like Israel facing the exile in Babylon – but while facing exile something happens through the Lord...again, it is not a mere "maintaining," but rather what the Holy Scriptures describe as mounting up as wings like eagles (Isaiah 40:31).

The eagle is a majestic figure in Holy Scripture...it soars; it rises about the tumult; it is greater than the predicted exile. It makes us – as the hymn says – to shine like the sun. What a picture of grace! Sin covers with death...darkness prevails, but not for the people of God; not for men like Don! There is more to that Scripture I quoted earlier from John 16:33: after the Lord predicted the tribulation, he said, "but take heart!" And why did the Lord say this? Answer: "for [Christ] has overcome the world!" Even in the face of the ultimate exile of death itself, the Lord of life conquered death. Light and life has prevailed over darkness and death! Our guarantee is the Lord Himself (Don's Savior and your Savior) who Himself said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live even though He dies, but whosoever believes in me will never die." This was Don's assurance...this was what was guaranteed him in his baptism; this is what was renewed in him through his frequent reception of the Sacrament; this is what he prayed for and this is why he loved the hymn!

"You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord, Who abide in His shadow for life, Say to the Lord: 'My refuge, My rock in whom I trust!' 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."

Note who is doing what...we just "dwell" and "abide," but the One doing all the work in the midst of trials is the Lord. He provides shelter...He covers with His shadow...He is our refuge; He is our rock...He raises us up...He bears us up...He makes us shine...He holds us in the palm of His hand...no matter what, the Lord is lifting us up and we're not "just getting by" but soaring as on the wings of eagles. But let's be clear about the metaphor: it means that your sins are forgiven; it means that you are raised above condemnation; it means you fly above the curse because the Lord of glory became your sin on the cross of Calvary; the Lord Jesus Christ was condemned in your stead (your judgment was on Him). That's why your condemnation before God is past. The result: you soar; you're free...he who believes in Him will never die. To know this impacts a life! It changes a person. What does this look like? Think of Don. He knew. He lived and lives on eagle's wings. So let us wait on the Lord; let us renew our strength; let us

mount up as on eagle's wings; and let us run and not be weary; let us walk and not faint! This is what Jesus gave to Don. This is what Jesus gives to you!