

CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 33

On Eagle's Wings

The other day I was driving along the highway next to the ocean and I noticed a large number of eagles in the trees. They had come, as they always do at this time of year, to await the annual migration of what a friend calls “the little fishies”—the herring. The eagles reminded me of a story I heard many years ago from a professor in my scripture studies.

One day he was out for a walk in the Sinai desert. He looked up and saw a strange sight. An eagle high above him seemed to be playing a game. As it was flying in the winds it would tilt to the side and drop something from its back. Then as the object fell, the eagle would swoop down and catch it again on its back. The eagle would climb to a higher altitude and do the same thing again. This happened three or four times but the last time he noticed a fluttering in the falling object. He realized the eagle was not playing a game. It was teaching its young chick how to fly. Watching this scene the prof told us that he finally realized the true significance of words he had read many times in the Book of Exodus.

The Israelites had been three months in the Sinai wilderness. They were continually complaining to Moses and his brother Aaron about this arid desert they had led the people into. It was unfamiliar and dangerous. Even though they had been slaves in Egypt, they missed the life they had come to accept as their fate.

“Yahweh called Moses up to the mountain and said, Tell this to the House of Jacob. Tell the Israelites you have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you away on eagle's wings and brought you to me.”(Exodus: 19:3-4)

I think this story of a loving God relates to our climate change challenge in three ways.

First, like the Israelites we are in an exodus. We have left the Cenozoic Era that started sixty million years ago when the dinosaurs died and have entered into the Anthropocene Era, the first man-made climate changing Era. It began with the Industrial Revolution. This new world is one that we don't understand or know how to deal with. We seem to be in a freefall with no one or nothing to catch us.

We may know that the economic and political systems we have created and depended upon are a major cause of the problem. But in this new era we find ourselves on the horns of a dilemma. As the American poet Robert Bass described it so ironically, *“Earth is in need of protection. And we are the only protectors. And we are what it needs to be protected from.”*

The second thing we can learn from the story is that we have within us a potential source of strength, a resilience. This might come from an awareness of a divine force as it did for the Israelites. It may come from a personal spirituality and a shared spirit of commitment with others in our community. Whatever the case the resilience comes from the same source—the living Earth and the conscious universe of which we are a part.

The final lesson from the story is about our role. We have a mission in our climate changing world. We are passing on to future generations a badly damaged world. We must do all we can to help those coming after us to understand and deal with this world.

I know. Our experience is not their experience. They often know more about the world they are living in than we do. But I am not talking about science or technology. I'm talking about a relationship and mission.

The relationship comes from our awareness that we are completely dependent upon the world we were born into. We are earthlings. This awareness is critical. It is what Gregory Bateson called "*the difference that makes a difference.*" It changes everything. We can tell those who come after us about our mistakes—why things are the way they are. We can also tell them how we came to our senses.

In terms of our mission we must do what we can to help future generations heal the damaged world we have passed on to them. Here education at the community level is critical.

We must help parents and schools develop the resilience and tools their children and students will need to deal with the changing world they are facing.

To quote Teilhard de Chardin, "*The future belongs to those who can give the next generation a sense of hope.*" Our mission is to help them learn to fly.

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