

## **Fly Like an Eagle**

The Rev. Dr. Katherine L. Ward

Have you ever heard the phrase: "familiarity breeds contempt?" It alleges that close association with or intimate knowledge of a person or thing leads to loss of respect for them or it. For instance, most of us know of Jennifer Hudson, the American Idol reject who won an Oscar for her role in the movie, "Dream Girls", was a spokesperson for Weight Watchers, having transformed herself into gorgeous woman by losing 80 pounds, and is now starring on Broadway in a revival of the musical, *The Color Purple*. Most of us and a few people in her Chicago neighborhood are probably ecstatic over her success. However, I also know that there are probably a lot more who are not. It's a human thing. It's hard for a home town to honor its own and the reason is because they have trouble honoring themselves. For some reason, we don't appreciate people and things we know well. "Familiarity breeds contempt." No matter how qualified a person might be, people who know that person well give them less respect than strangers do, perhaps because of envy or fear that the person may no longer be close to them or may look down on them. We can imagine some people saying, "Who does she think she is? I remember when she first sang a solo in church . . . She's no big star. She's

just Jennifer who lives down the street in the hood. I know her strengths and her weaknesses. How dare she come to the Golden Globes, the Oscars and seek the Tony claiming authority?" The more authority the "celebrity" claims, the more hostility he or she receives from those who knew them "when".

That's what happened when Jesus went back to His home town and served as a reader in the temple. He had preached all over the countryside, but not there. Imagine His excitement! He stood up in the synagogue and read from Isaiah: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed . . ." The crowd really became hostile when He spoke with authority, claiming that the scripture He read was being fulfilled in their presence. He was saying to his native folk: "God is real. The redemption of lost humanity is happening even as we speak, and you are its intended beneficiaries, not its audience. You are anointed. You are to be in solidarity with the poor. You are to show hospitality to the stranger. You are to provide access to those who are outcast by society." Now, one would think that His excitement would catch on, that it would spread like wildfire. But, instead of becoming excited, they became enraged. Remember, a

prophet may be praised everywhere else, but is without honor at home. They felt that, as chosen people, they were entitled to someone or something better. That sense of entitlement only fanned the flames of hostility. In their rage, they drove Jesus to the edge of a cliff and attempted to throw Him over.

Was their contempt truly due to familiarity? I suggest that familiarity can actually lead to greater love. Their hostility probably stemmed from something different, like disrespect, negative energy and insecurity. Taking others for granted and developing a “me first” attitude are more likely culprits. When we feel valued, hostility and scorn fly out the window. Insecurity blocks out the truth and causes us to act like the little eaglet who was somehow left in the chicken yard. He started his life thinking he was a chicken. He took on all the characteristics of a chicken, cackling with the others all day, flirting with Mary and Judy Hen, and engaging in idle gossip rather than dealing with the truth. He lived in fear of the chicken hawk and the farmer. The farmer tried to convince him that he could fly, that he could soar far above the madness, away from his enemies but the eaglet would not believe anything the farmer said. Nothing could convince him that he had special eyes that are shielded from the sun and feathers that protected him from wind, rain and cold. He would not even

believe that eagles were monogamous, mating with only one eagle and remaining faithful for life. He definitely would not believe that he was a strong bird with a commanding presence. He seldom left the ground and even when the farmer took him to the top of the roof or the top of the hill and urged him to fly, he just sank to the ground. Finally, the farmer took him to the top of the mountain where it was either fly or die. Only then did the eagle spread its 7-foot wings and take to the sky. Aren't we like that? We go with the crowd. We want to be in the "in" group which sometimes won't accept the truth. They don't believe that Jesus didn't preach doctrine, didn't call for anyone to build great temples, didn't exclude any one from his circle but said, "come unto me all who are burdened or heavy laden". We, like that little eaglet, live in fear. When someone dares to remind us of what Jesus actually said and what God actually values, we sometimes disbelieve and dishonor. We resort to violence like the people of Nazareth. We fear others, we fear things, we fear fear. And, most of all, we live in denial, refusing to claim our fear. We blame others and look for an enemy rather than accept responsibility and seek friends. We curse problems rather than fix them. We defend ourselves rather than correct our self-destructive behavior. We bluster rather than forgive. We throw stones rather than offer

bandages. Our smallness and insecurity keep us from acknowledging the gifts of others just as some Chicagoans won't accept Jennifer's gifts and some Nazarenes did not accept Jesus' gifts. And, most unfortunately, too often the recipients of such hateful behavior sometime give up and, like the eaglet, don't live up to their own potential. That insane cycle must be broken.

We can break the cycle by learning to walk in the way of love. The way of love requires us to acknowledge the gifts of others and to praise and acknowledge our own gifts. The way of love is the way of God, who is love. If we operate from a foundation of love, we will not resent or envy the accomplishments of others. Love, as scripture says, is patient and kind and DOES NOT ENVY. It keeps no record of wrongs. It rejoices with the truth. It protects, hopes and perseveres. It does not fail. Honoring our own is the path to love. If we honor our own, we will realize that it takes nothing away from us. In fact, it enlarges us. It extends our boundaries. It helps us to claim our own authority. The fear which grips us and tries to hold others down so we can appear majestic can be eliminated. The process of honoring others will help us to discover the majesty we already have. God made us in God's image. We are as majestic as eagles. We have a commanding presence. We are strong and have power and grace. We have exceptional vision.

God's word protects us from Satan just as the feathers of the eagle protect it from wind, rain and cold. And, most importantly, we can fly high, high in the sky, not worrying about the s-u-n because we are anointed like the S-o-n. If we claim our own majesty, we can honor Jennifer's and Christ's. We don't have to try to denigrate Jennifer's talent or force Jesus over the cliff of our vanity. It is high time we stop cackling with the chickens and become people of courage. [Cowards are called chickens for a reason.] It's time for us to fly or die.

So, fly, Christians, fly. To slightly change the quote of a great feminine leader, Dr. P. Walker, I tell you that we here at All Saints have boarded Connecting Flight # 2016. We have reached a cruising altitude of 85 years [105 if you go back to the original founding in Oakland] and are ascending to even higher heights. As we continue this journey, please make sure your commitment to Service, Leadership and Empowerment is fastened, secure and locked in an upright position. Turn off all careless, negative, self-destructive devices, dispose of any discouragement, hurt or other hazardous materials that may delay process and progress. Deposit suspicion, hatred and fear in the trash bag the stewardess will pass around. Should we lose focus, drive or altitude during the journey, our faith, prayer and Christian action

can be used as flotation devices. In the event of an emergency, be sure to encourage and support others before thinking about yourselves because we are compelled to *Lift as we Climb*. Grace, Mercy and Favor will automatically be activated by our expressions of Compassion, Humility and Love. We are cleared for takeoff and our destination is GREATNESS for God is real and is redeeming lost humanity even as we speak. God can renew your strength so you can mount up with wings like eagles. You can run and not be weary. You can walk and not faint. You are eagles, not chickens. Live into your anointing and bring good news to the poor. Show hospitality to the stranger. Provide access to those who are outcast by society. Set the captives free. Give sight to the blind and liberty to the oppressed. Fulfill Scripture in and with your lives. Let Christ live in and through you. You can fly close to the s-u-n because you fly with the S-O-N. Claim your authority. Honor God. Honor yourself. Honor all others, especially your own. Familiarity only breeds contempt if you don't have love. WE ARE PEOPLE OF LOVE! We strive to live out our baptismal vows, to seek the good in ourselves and others and to be grateful for what we have rather than grumble about what we don't have. We refuse to let the phrase "familiarity breeds contempt" become a self-fulfilling prophecy. I know that in the

year and a half I've been here, I have enjoyed getting to know you, becoming familiar with you and letting you know how to become familiar with me.

I've gotten to know you, to know all about you . . . to like you, to know you like me. I've been getting to know you, and putting it my way, but nicely . . . You are precisely my cup of tea.

Haven't you noticed, suddenly I'm bright and breezy

Because of all the beautiful and new things I'm learning about you day by day. [from *The King and I*]

For us people of love, familiarity breeds greater love.

*Amen*

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