

GOD TRULY HAS AN ENDURING LOVE AND PRESERVING CARE FOR HIS
CHILDREN

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Lent 2018 (The celebration of the 25th
Anniversary of the AELC)
Deuteronomy 32:11-12

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Deuteronomy 32:11-12: ¹¹ **As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young birds, as it spreads out its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions,** ¹² **so the LORD alone used to lead him, and no foreign god was with him.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The words of our text for today were spoken by Moses, the great prophet of the Old Testament, a type of Christ,¹ on a most solemn and momentous occasion.

These words of Moses were part of his farewell address to the children of Israel. Finally, after forty years of wandering around in the wilderness, Moses had brought the twelve tribes to the plains of Moab on the border of the Promised Land. Beyond the mountains lay the river Jordan and the land of Canaan, the blessed goal of all their weary pilgrimage. The time had come when Moses, that mighty man of God “*whom the Lord knew face to face,*” (Deut. 34:10) but who, too, according to the decree of God, was prohibited from entering the Promised Land², would depart this life. Calmly submitting to the will of God, Moses begins to set his house in order before his death.

Assembling all the congregation of Israel for a last farewell, he rehearses to them again the Law of God, recalling to their minds all the loving kindness they had experienced during those years at the hands of the ever gracious

¹ Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22-23

² Numbers 20ff

LORD, the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and pleads with them once again with all the tenderness of a father that they, God's own chosen people, might obey His commandments, ever faithfully serve Him, and never leave Him nor forsake Him to follow after strange gods. Then, after having given Joshua charge over the people in the name of the LORD, he pours out his soul in which he so sublimely praises the surpassing excellency of his God in all His dealings with the chosen people. "*The portion of the LORD is His people: Jacob is the plot of ground that He has inherited.... He used to surround him, He used to take care of him, and He used to protect him like the pupil of His eye,*" (vv. 9-10), Moses sings, and adds as the crowning expression of that wonderful love and preserving care which so continually attended them in all these days, the words of our text: **¹¹ As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young birds, as it spreads out its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions, ¹² so the LORD alone used to lead him, and no foreign god was with him.**

One can surely see how those glowing words of Moses must have silenced the hearts of the assembled congregation of Israel on that memorable occasion!

You, too, dear friends, have gathered here this morning in God's house of worship to celebrate a most eventful occasion in the history of our church, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the AELC. Together we meditate upon all the mercies and upon all the truths God has revealed to us as a church and as individuals during all these years. Now, since God's dealings with Israel, the Church of old, are all typical of God's dealings with His children of today and with His children everywhere and at all times, what can be more appropriate than for me to assure you of the comforting and reassuring word of Moses that we have read as our text. God truly has an enduring love and preserving care for His children.

Listen again to part of our text: **¹¹ As an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young birds, as it spreads out its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions, ¹² so the LORD alone used to lead him.**

The figure of an eagle was a familiar one with Moses. Speaking at another place of the wonderful deliverance which the LORD had provided to the children of Israel from the oppressive hands of Pharaoh, he says: "*You*

yourself have seen what I have done to the Egyptians, and how I have carried you on the wings of eagles and have brought you here to Myself!" (Ex. 19:4).

During his shepherd days in the land of Midian, Moses had frequently marked the habits of the eagle, and so this allusion to the eagle and its loving care for her young was just as natural for him as a similar illustration, that of a hen gathering her chicks under her wings, was to our beloved Saviour.³

The eagle has a most tender affection for her young and shows it in a very peculiar manner. When she thinks her young are strong enough to fly, she stirs up her nest, breaking it up, making it so disagreeable for her young that they must leave it. Then she flutters over them and shows them how to fly in order to encourage them to try their own wings. If she fails in this, she will spread her wings and, taking her young ones on them, will soar into the sky. Then suddenly she will glide from beneath them, leaving them for the moment to the care of themselves. Her young have no choice but to fly for themselves, but, if they are unable to bear themselves up, she will glide beneath them again and catch them, stopping their fall and bring them back again in safety to the rock or ledge on which the nest was built.

Now, according to Moses, as an eagle trains, leads, and guides her young, so the LORD lovingly dealt with His chosen people. Ever faithful to His promises, God's enduring love and preserving care was continually with them, granting them every blessing in temporal and spiritual things. Whenever they were in danger of forgetting Him and neglecting His service and losing sight of the glorious hope and expectation of their promised inheritance, God would stir up their nest, that is, He would send them needful trials and afflictions. Remember last Sunday how we learnt from James that God uses trials to make us flee to, and cling to Him.⁴

When the sons of Jacob, the brothers of Joseph, found themselves in Egypt, and Joseph arranged for them to dwell in the fair land of Goshen during the severe famine that had gripped the country, they no doubt often told

³ Matthew 23:37

⁴ Sermon delivered on James 1:12-18

themselves, “This is a pleasant place, we have a goodly heritage, with plenty of supplies to see us through.”⁵ They were in a safe nest, and as long as their enjoyment of the good things in Egypt lasted, they had no desire to leave that pleasant land. But this was not God’s purpose with them. He wanted to establish His children in that blessed country which He had promised to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and so, in order to awaken in them a desire for that promised land, He “stirred up their nest,” making the land of Egypt very disagreeable and unbearable for them. Another king arose, who made their lives bitter with hard work and reduced them to abject slavery.⁶ The people began to groan because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cries were heard by the LORD, who remembered the covenant made with their forefathers, and out of their prayer for deliverance, the LORD sent Moses.

What a faithful picture this is, dear members of the AELC, of God’s gracious dealings with you! A quarter century ago, the AELC was officially formed. No longer able to tolerate the false doctrines permeating the Lutheran Church of Australia, you had no choice but to leave. But that leaving of the Lutheran Church of Australia marked the beginning of God’s blessings upon you as a church and as members of the individual congregations that would make up the AELC. For the past twenty-five years, God’s Word and promise has been made true to you: “*In every place where I make My name known I shall come to you and I shall bless you,*” (Ex. 20:24). During all these years His mercies have been new unto you every morning and His faithfulness exceedingly great. Prospering you abundantly in all things temporal, He has especially blessed you in all spiritual things in Christ. During that time, God’s Word has been preached to you by faithful pastors in all its truth and purity, making plain as day to you the one and only way to salvation, Jesus Christ, the Crucified One, assuring you of the full forgiveness of all your sins by faith in Him and His redeeming merits and comforting your hearts with the joyful hope and expectation of life everlasting. So, **as an eagle stirs up its nest and hovers over its young birds, as it spreads out its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions**, during all these years the Lord has surrounded you, taken

⁵ Genesis 45

⁶ Exodus 1

care of you, and has protected you like the pupil of His eye, the special objects of His enduring love and preserving care. At times, too, when it was needful, He has “stirred up your nest,” sending trials and tribulations. As you think of the history of the AELC, you will find that they have not been altogether unmixed with days and times of which you had to say, “*I don’t like what’s happening.*” The AELC certainly has had to pass through periods of stress and conflict – it hasn’t all been smooth sailing, and as individuals, I am sure that you too, have had your share of trials and tribulations. Illness, death and bereavement have entered your homes and family circle and bowed down your hearts with a weight of woe. But also, these things, in the light and application of our text, were of God. His love it was that sent them, and His wisdom it was that selected them, for that is God’s way of “stirring up the nest.” King Solomon writes, and the same words are repeated by the writer of Hebrews, “*For the LORD disciplines the one whom He loves, and, like a father, He disciplines the son in whom He delights,*” (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6). Behind and underneath all your trials was the good and gracious will and design of your heavenly Father to draw you more closely to Him, who is the Author and Finisher of your salvation and the Source of all true happiness, to induce you more and more to set your affections on things above, to strengthen your faith, encourage your hope, quicken your charity and thus, by His grace, to make you more and more eager to become partakers together with Him of the blessed inheritance of the saints in light, the Church Triumphant in heaven.

So, for the past twenty-five years God’s enduring love and preserving care have followed you in the green pastures and beside the still waters and through the shadowy valley of trials and tribulations. And always as you walked with Him, when danger threatened, temptation assailed, sin accused, or when sorrow filled your heart, always He bore you up as on eagles’ wings; always beneath you were the everlasting arms of the Father, sustaining you, comforting you, and making all things work together only for your good. David, looking back over the years of his eventful life and recalling to mind the loving-kindness of God that had attended all his days, takes up his harp and sings: “*I remember these things as I pour out my soul. For I used to walk with the crowd and lead them in procession to the house of God, with the sound of*

joyful shouting and thanksgiving — with a crowd celebrating a festival,” (Ps. 42:4).

Surely today, in celebrating our twenty-fifth anniversary, we must remember the love, the mercy, and the truth the same precious LORD has revealed to us, and so we lift up grateful hearts to praise and bless His holy name and sing: “*Praise to the Lord... Who as on wings of an eagle uplifteth, sustaineth,*” (LH 442 stanza 2).

Our text states: ¹² **so the LORD alone used to lead him, and no foreign god was with him.**

It was the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the only true God, who so carefully, lovingly, and so visibly blessed, defended, and preserved His chosen people. To Him therefore all praise and glory was due. The faithful among the people recognised this and glorified the LORD alone, the God of the Covenant, of whose words and promises nothing fell to the ground, but which were all fulfilled. That is the very truth which the successor of Moses, Joshua, would repeatedly acknowledge.⁷ So you, my dear members of the AELC, must acknowledge that it was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who speaks to us from the Scriptures, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose blessed name our church was established twenty-five years ago, being built “*on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and Christ Jesus Himself is the Cornerstone,*” (Eph. 2:20). It was to the glory of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that the AELC was established. It was to glorify Him who had died for us that our church’s founding members, some who have since passed away, but some are still with us, laboured with such self-sacrifice. To Him they prayed, to Him they gave all glory, on Him they called, from Him they expected every blessing, and by the grace of God all of us here today have remained faithful to that same Lord. Whenever we come into His house, whenever the organ sounds forth and the voices of our congregations are lifted, it is always to give thanks to Him and to glorify Him, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and for ever.⁸ Every divine service is a service of worship and praise to that same God, and there is no strange god

⁷ Joshua 21:45; 23:14

⁸ Hebrews 13:8

among us. He makes Himself known and serves us through Word and Sacrament. Let us remember and acknowledge this today, upon this occasion, with special emphasis. Let the words of Psalm 9 be our vow: ¹ *I shall give thanks to the LORD with all my heart. I shall tell about all Your marvellous deeds.* ² *I shall be glad and rejoice in You. I shall sing praise to Your name, O Most High,* (v. 1-2).

Our gratitude to the Triune God should show itself also in our loyalty and faithfulness to the doctrine and practices which we have learned from Scripture and from the Confessions of our Church. Faithful worshippers of the true God have always had their foes. The true Church of Christ upon earth is a Church Militant. Each generation of it must face the attacks of enemies, detractors, and traitors. As individual Christians we must fight the good fight of faith, and as the church of Jesus Christ we must face foes from within and from without.

We all know how there is a sharp decline in Christianity in our nation, and how there is a growing chorus of people speaking out against the Christian Church. It could very well happen that as time goes on, our foes will threaten us with destruction, with bodily harm, and yes, even with persecution and death. If so, then we must remember the word of our Lord: *“Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell!”* (Matt. 10:28), and we must do what the first congregation at Jerusalem did when they suffered persecution. They went to the Lord in prayer, asking, ²⁹ *“Even now, Lord, look on their threats; and grant to Your servants that they may keep speaking Your Word with all boldness,* ³⁰ *as You stretch out Your hand to heal; and grant that miraculous signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus!”* (Acts 4: 29-30). In times of persecution, the Holy Spirit fills believers with boldness in the face of intimidation.

At another time these enemies of the Church will flatter us and invite us to join them. It will be like the time when Sanballat, the governor of Samaria, and Geshem, the ruler of desert tribes in northern Arabia said to Nehemiah while he was working on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem: *“Come! Let us meet together at Hakkephirim in the plain of Ono!”* Nehemiah answered them: *“I*

am doing an important work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?" (Nehemiah 6:2-3). So it is with our foes, the enemies of the truth, who have introduced all manner of errors into the church. They will invite us to go with them, to ignore any differences we might have, to tolerate false doctrine. To all these we must say what Nehemiah said to Sanballat and Geshem: *"I cannot come down."*

This loyalty must be a part of our gratitude to the God who has so graciously enriched us with His truth, so that it can be said of us what Paul said of the congregation at Corinth: *"⁵ For in Him you have been made rich in every way, in all speech and all knowledge, ⁶ just as the testimony about Christ has been confirmed in you. ⁷ Therefore you do not lack any charismatic gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed,"* (1 Cor. 1:5-7). How ungrateful of us it would be if we surrendered any part of the precious truth which God has so graciously bestowed upon us!

But our gratitude should be demonstrated also in our lives. Let us lead such lives that our light may shine among men, so that they may see our good works. Let us, as much as lies in us, close the mouth of those who slander us by our godly conversation. Let us heed what is said 1 Peter 2:15: *"For this is what God wants, that, by doing what is right, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people."* All about us should see our devotion to our Church; they should note that we are blessed through its ministrations. We are to be a light unto this world. We are to be a salt in the midst of the moral decay of the world about us. God, through His Word and Sacraments, gives us the power, gives us the means. Let us utilise it all, so that we may glorify Him who has been so gracious to us.

Moses, declaring God's Word and will to the congregation of Israel, had to leave them because it pleased the Lord to take him to Himself, but not before he had given Joshua charge over His people. So God buries the workers, but carries on the work. For, after all, the work is God's and not ours. That inspires us when we take it up and comforts us when we lay it down. We do not know what the next five years will bring to our church, let alone the next twenty-five. We shall leave our future up to God. But we do know that God's Word

will not return to Him without results, but it will accomplish what He desires and be successful in what He has sent it to do.⁹

In the meantime, we thank God for the past twenty-five years, and pray that He would continue to grant us the privilege of labouring in His vineyard. We thank Him that we are able to freely gather around His means of grace as we await the day when He says to each and every one of us: *“Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things. I shall put you in charge of many things. Enter into your master’s joy!”* (Matthew 25:21).

To Him, be all glory given. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for Your marvellous grace to sinful people. You dwell in a light that no one can approach, but You have now shown Yourself to us in Your Son Jesus Christ. Through Him we approach You confidently as Your dear children. You are the Creator and Ruler of this vast universe, yet You are concerned for the happiness and good of each one of us. Accept our humble worship and praise, and grant that we may continue in our gracious fellowship with You through Jesus Christ.

We thank You, Father, that You have chosen us not to suffer Your anger, but to receive Your forgiveness, and to possess salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died and rose again for us. We thank You for blessing the past twenty-five years of the AELC with Your presence. As our founding members were bold enough to stand up and confess Your name in all its truth and purity, may we continue to do the same today in a world that is increasingly becoming ungodly. We pray that You would use us to lead more away from their darkness, to You, the only True Light. Since You desire all people to be saved and to come to know the truth, give us opportunities to proclaim Your Gospel

⁹ Isaiah 55:11

to the ends of the earth. Inspire us to work, pray, and give for the salvation of people who as yet do not know You.

Grant that we may walk in obedience to Your commandments, test all things by Your Word, cling to what is good, and have nothing to do with any kind of evil. Make us holy by Your Spirit to live the life of holiness, to which Christ has called us, and keep us free of all fault until His coming.

Grant that all in authority in our country may respect Your holy will. Forgive those in authority who have forgotten about You and Your ways and lead them back to the knowledge that a nation is only made great when society is built on Your commandments and precepts.

Protect from harm those who are in danger. Give peace and harmony to the nations on earth. Look with favour upon those whose task it is to feed the world. Send appropriate weather for our needs.

Make our homes harmonious places where the Holy Spirit is present with His power and wisdom. Give spiritual insight to all mothers. Grant all fathers godly leadership. Give all children an obedient spirit.

Continue to bless the work of Your church. We pray for those who are in fellowship with the AELC. May we continue to work together, and joyfully without hindrance gather around Word and Sacrament.

Have mercy on all who have gathered here today. Support the weak; correct the disobedient. Comfort us whenever we are troubled in body, mind, or spirit. Be with those members who are sick or are dealing with any other problems. Remember our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in nursing homes or hospitals. Remind them that You are near, and that You do uphold them with Your everlasting arms.

We ask these things, and everything else we need, in the name of Your Son Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom for us all. Amen.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

¹ When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to

Abram, and told him: "I am God Almighty. Live in My presence and be blameless! ² I shall make My Covenant between Me and

you, and I shall give you very many descendants.”

³ Abram fell facedown and God spoke to him: ⁴ “This is My very own Covenant with you. You will be the father of many nations.

⁵ You will not be called ‘Abram’ any more, but your name will be ‘Abraham,’ because I have made you a father of many nations. ⁶ I shall make you extremely fruitful, I shall make nations of you, and kings will come from you. ⁷ I shall establish My Covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for generations to come. It will be an everlasting Covenant, that I may be your God and the God of your descendants after you...

¹⁵ God also told Abraham: “As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her ‘Sarai,’ but her name shall be ‘Sarah’! ¹⁶ I shall bless her; and I have also given you a son from her. I shall bless her, and she will become the mother of nations. Kings of peoples will come from her.”

Romans 5:1-11

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also

we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only that, but we also glory in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance produces character; and character, hope. ⁵ Hope does not disappoint us either, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to us. ⁶ For, while we were still helpless, at the set time Christ died for ungodly people. ⁷ For very rarely will someone die for a righteous person, although someone might perhaps even dare to die for a good person.

⁸ However, God shows His own love for us by this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Much more, therefore, now that we have been justified by His blood, we shall be saved through Him from God’s wrath. ¹⁰ For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, now that we have been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus

Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Mark 8:27-38

²⁷ Then Jesus went away with His disciples to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way He asked His disciples, “Who do people say I am?”

²⁸ They answered Him, “John the Baptist; but others say Elijah, and others say one of the other prophets.”

²⁹ He asked them, “You, however, who do you say I am?”

Peter answered Him, “You are the Christ!”

³⁰ He strictly warned them not to tell anyone about Him.

³¹ Then Jesus began to teach them that it was necessary for the Son of Man to suffer greatly, to be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, to be killed, and, after three days, to rise again. ³² He was speaking frankly about this, and Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ³³ However, Jesus turned around, looked at His disciples, and rebuked Peter, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! For you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

³⁴ When He had called the crowd to Him together with His disciples,

He told them: “If anyone wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me!

³⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever will lose his life for My sake and for the sake of the Good News will save it. ³⁶ For what good does it do a person to gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul? ³⁷ For what is a person to give in exchange for his soul? ³⁸ For, if anyone is ashamed of Me and of My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”