

Some crows have managed to break through the cages on the Manse Chimney pots and have built nests. They are making quite a racket at the moment – which is especially annoying a silly-o'clock in the morning when they are up and about and I am trying to sleep! Hopefully before too long their young ones will be able to fly the nest and peace will return – as will some new chimney cages, I hope!

I recently came across an illustration which I know I have used previously, but which I think is very relevant in our present situation. It comes from the Song of Moses which he recited to the people of Israel as part of his final words to them. Here is part of the song from Deuteronomy 31:

³ I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Oh, praise the greatness of our God!

⁴ He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just.

A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he.

⁷ Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past.

Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you.

⁸ When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.^[b]

⁹ For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance.

¹⁰ In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste.

He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye,

¹¹ like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.

¹² The LORD alone led him; no foreign god was with him.

Moses uses an illustration from nature and what happens in an eagle's nest to show the people of Israel how God has acted towards them. When the time comes for the young eaglets to fly their nest, the parent bird first tries to coax the youngster into flight. But it is cosy and warm in the nest and the eaglets do not want to leave. The mother eagle then resorts to harsher tactics to force her offspring off the nest and into the air, by disturbing their comfort. Similarly, when God's people were settled comfortably in Egypt after Joseph had brought them there, God stirred up their nest as the Egyptians enslaved and then persecuted them until they were ready to leave Egypt for their Promised Land. Stirring up the nest is something God has often used with his people – and maybe that's exactly what he is doing to us today.

Why does God disturb our nest? Just as the mother eagle does it in order that her offspring might fly, so God sometimes has to shake us out of our comfort zone, so that we might fly for him. The construction of an eagle's nest is interesting. Built high in the mountains the nest is usually placed precariously on a narrow ledge. The base of the nest is made of strong but sharp thorns. The nest is then built up with softer downy materials so that the top layer is nice and soft. The young eaglets are very comfortable sitting there in the nest being fed by their mother and they don't want the scary thought of leaving and flying on their own. The mother eagle then stops bringing them food and then she starts dismantling the nest – removing the soft downy lining. Now the eaglets become restless and move around. Eventually one of them falls off the nest. As the experience of falling the

eaglet automatically begins to flap its wings and fly. If the mother bird didn't disturb the nest and force it to try to fly, the eaglet's wings would never become strong enough for flight and it would eventually starve to death. This is the purpose of the mother's harsh treatment and Moses is pointing out to the people of Israel why God has stirred up their nest – so that they could take flight from slavery in Egypt and move on to their Promised Land.

Is God, in the same way, disturbing us because we've got to comfortable sitting around in our little nests and so we are not taking flight and being the people he wants us to be? We, in common with all of God's people in the western world are certainly being disturbed at the moment. For longer than anyone can remember, the church has been in a very comfortable position. We've gone about things in the same way as previous generations have done – and often that's been a matter of going through the motions. Attending church on a Sunday morning, maybe being involved in some of the church's activities and organisations during the week if we're keen enough; maybe even being in leadership if we're really keen. But now that little nest has been several disturbed, and we are feeling uncomfortable without our religious safety-blanket of regular activities. I wonder is God shaking us up and saying, *"I don't want you to go back to the comfortable way of doing things, but to take wings and do things differently."*? If we are honest, would we not have to admit that, by and large, our churches are in decline and we don't have the same influence and impact on a society that is becoming increasingly godless.

God has a plan for us his church – just as he did for Israel in Egypt. They didn't understand why God was allowing them to be enslaved making bricks for pyramids, nor even why he took them through the years in the wilderness, and if you read Exodus you will see how they complained bitterly throughout the process. Similarly we can't see what God's plan is for his church today (and no doubt we will complain about what is happening) – but we can be sure it is for our good in the long term.

Let's go back to the eagle's nest. The young eaglet is thinking, *"Help, I'm being pushed out of my nest. I've never used my wings before – I don't know what to do. Panic – I'm falling. There's no security. I wish I could get back into my nest again."* Then the eaglet hears the fluttering of massive wings as well as his own little ones, and there is his mother swooping under him as he falls, catching him and carrying him away from danger. Perhaps we are feeling a bit of spiritual panic at this moment – afraid of where things are going and wondering if we will be able to cope. But we have the assurance that God never closer than when he disturbs our rest. Just as the young eaglet experiences the security and sustaining power of his mother, we have a God who had promised to be with us and sustain us no matter what happens.

The result of the mother eagle disturbing the nest is that her eaglets learn to fly and fend for themselves. Similarly, the end result of our present disturbance, whatever it may be, will be for our good and for the good of Christ's church. So, let's not panic about what's happening, but instead wait upon the Lord, remembering the words of 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.*

I believe that the Lord has exciting times ahead for us and for his church. I hope, like me, you can't wait to see what he is going to do!