



I want to tell you about a man named “Tim Dean.” “Tim” had a voice that I didn’t know was possible in the small town where I grew up. He always sounded like he should be living in a big city, where he could do voiceovers for car dealership commercials or be the play-by-play announcer for a baseball team on the radio. And yet, his full-time job was at a bank on the main street of our town. But he still managed to use his vocal talents: on high school football Friday nights, he would make the trek up to the press box just before halftime before his bass range would rattle the stands as he introduced the “*pride of the marching Rams band!*” During the week, he would often be rehearsing for an upcoming play or musical at our local Star Theater. For some of us, however, we knew him more for where he was on a Sunday morning, as he stood in the middle of the back row, right in front of the altar, to sing in the church choir.

Now, when I got to my teenage years, I started to sing in more choirs, myself, and so I started taking voice lessons from the director of music at the church. Soon enough, she encouraged me to join the big-kid choir, and I still remember her suggesting that for the Wednesday evening rehearsals, I should sit beside the most illustrious “Tim Dean.” I must admit, it was rather intimidating, at first, being beside this towering figure with a voice that could rival James Earl Jones, himself. I did not have much confidence, to say the least, in my next-to-nothing vocal talent. I shouldn’t have been in the same choir as “Tim Dean,” let alone be right next to him in the off chance my voice would severely cramp his style.

Honestly, I was worried how he would act around me: if he would be one of those stereotypical church pew people, who were masters at giving the most penetrating glares to other pew occupiers, who were not acting or speaking or even singing up to their obviously God-level perfect standards. Nevertheless, good ‘ole “Tim” had a kindness and understanding almost as impressive as his musical gifts. He never pulled a split-second glance over his shoulder at me whenever I sang off-key. He never took time after rehearsals to put me in my place. Instead, he would extend an appreciation that I was there, and just sing by example. I knew I would never have the voice of “Tim Dean,” but sitting beside him gave me the needed comforting foundation to sing out, as if even my voice was needed in the body of Christ.

Naturally, Tim was asked by the director to sing plenty of solos over the years, some of which had his voice soar up to the balcony and into the upstairs Sunday school rooms and the basement fellowship hall below. Except, the one I remember most was “On Eagle’s Wings.” It was no where near the best song to truly showcase his immense vocal prowess. It’s just that he sang it in such a way to make you fall in love with the words even more, especially that most meaningful refrain:

*And he will raise you up on eagle’s wings,
bear you on the breath of dawn,
make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of his hand.*

He didn’t just sing the words; he proclaimed them as if they were the Gospel God’s honest truth: incredibly Great News that was meant not just for certain higher echelon singers in the sanctuary, but all the people in that room, and those who couldn’t be there, and all of God’s children, no questions asked!

That this God of ours is the one who will raise us up on eagle's wings even if we cannot sing on-key. This is the God who will raise us up with hope each and every day even if we cannot find the words to pray what we really want to say deep-down. This is the God who will raise us up to new life even if we do not always do the best when it comes to caring for our own life and the lives of others. This is the God who yearns for our face to shine like the sun, because our Lord is convinced that we have something to offer, not just to our fellow church members, but to all of God's children.

"On Eagle's Wings" is inspired, in part, by the 91st psalm that we heard a portion of this morning, and it's that last verse in the psalm that I find especially powerful: "With long life will I satisfy them, and show them my salvation." God most definitively showed the world an eternal life-saving act in Jesus Christ, and it's that most incredible news that is meant to make us feel a fulness of love and grace within us. As if we are cared for just that much by a most holy God, who, instead of unleashing penetrating glares of guilt and shame from the heavens when we don't act or sing a certain way; instead, insists on working through people like "Tim Dean," who have a way of convincing us that such hope and new life is meant for us, too. The "Tim Deans" of the world, who will give us the needed inspiration, that no matter our shortcomings or faults and fears, to sing out with joy anyway, and have our faces shine like the sun with the never-ending light of Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, now and forevermore. For that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!