# On Eagle’s WingsA Service for Black History Month

**Call to worship:**

One: Do you really not know…

**All: that he is God of all in the heavens and on the earth?**

One: Have you really not heard…
**All: how she has brought princes to naught and oppressors to their knees?**

One: Haven’t you already been told…
**All: that you’re counted among the stars, and that you matter?**

One: Do you not know, have you not heard?

**All: We come to learn, we come for our strength to be renewed, we come in hope.**

**Hymn: “**Arise, Your Light Is Come” (VU 79)

**Prayer of Approach:**

Creator God, you who have called forth each star by name, we are in your presence this hour. We come before you acknowledging and celebrating the journeys of our Black siblings and cousins far and wide. We come knowing that these journeys have been met with much strife and pain, and although there have been triumphs along the way, the pain and brokenness of oppression lingers yet. But we come celebrating a people whom you have infused with a boundless faith, and whose hope in you has manifested into renewable strength and fortitude. And so we come, Creator God. Guide our worship this hour. May we not grow weary but soar on eagle’s wings as one people, bound together in your love. Amen.

**Scripture Readings:**

Psalm 103 (VU page 825)

Ephesians 3:14–21

Isaiah 40:21–31

**Prayer of Confession:**

Holy God, we know how easy it is for us to forget who you are. It is easy for us to claim ignorance of your power and your love. It is so easy for us point fingers at others and forget our own roles in contributing to an unfair and unjust world. It is easy for us to block the images of oppression on television and on social media. Forgive our disregard, O God. Open all the closed corners of our minds that they may be opened to the reality of injustice all around us. Resensitize us unto our human selves so that we can be appropriately appalled and pained at violence and oppression. Reconcile us to each other as one. Amen.

**Assurance:**

Know this and receive this: The Lord gives strength to the weary, and mercy to the sorrowful. If you hope in the Lord you shall not stumble or faint, but be lifted up on eagle’s wings. Amen.

**Sermon: Seeking Renewable Strength**

*[Interjections from two voices add a sense of drama.*

*You can also watch a 14-min. Storyhive documentary on Amber Valley:* [*Secret Alberta: The Former Life of Amber Valley*](https://youtu.be/OxXJubB2cPQ)*.]*

In the early 1900s the Canadian Prairies gained some unexpected migrants through their US advertisements for new Canadian settlers. European migrants from Germany and Ukraine were moving across Canada in droves, and many had already settled in Northern Alberta, but a different wave of migrants were about to embark upon Alberta. They were post-slavery American Black migrants from Oklahoma, and they were headed for Amber Valley, which is just on the outskirts of Athabasca, AB.

The first wave of Amber Valley pioneers were led by a pastor, Henry Steed, in 1909. It is hard to imagine how anyone, Black or White, would take their families on such a treacherous trip from Oklahoma to northern Alberta, and especially in the days of little to no infrastructure. What a gruelling experience that must have been—to come to settle in the Great North with minus 50 weather. According to the *National Post*, Canadian Whites weren’t at all crazy about the idea of a bunch of “coloured folk” coming to settle in Alberta, but they took no action against talks of the migration because they strongly doubted that Black people (even those dodging Jim Crow laws) would want to or be able to survive the northern Alberta winters.

In Isaiah 40:21–31, we explore a message of comfort and hope to the Israelites. It was prophesied that the people of Israel would be in exile, and that they would need this message as a reminder of the power of God and of God’s ultimate love for them. This scripture focuses on God’s enabling of God’s people to combat weariness and fragility to a position of strength and hopefulness, much like our Amber Valley pioneers.

*Voice A:* We all know what it’s like to feel weary and worn from problems that plague us.

*Voice B:* Sometimes our tiredness comes from watching the world around us fall apart, and we become overwhelmed with helplessness.

Isaiah’s message to us is that we need to encourage each other to stay the course, just as Isaiah was encouraging his people to stay the course. Do you not know that God can do all things? Haven’t you heard how God has brought oppressors to their knees? Do you not know that God will lift you up? We need to be a source of encouragement to our Black siblings and cousins.

*Voice A:* Offering moral support when a relation faces injustice of fear of injustice.

*Voice B:* Making a pledge to stand against bigotry and oppression.

*Voice A:* Continual prayers for our Black siblings and cousins.

*Voice B:* We won’t arrive unless we arrive together.

The human mind and flesh are weak, and we will falter and grow weary. We will become discouraged and hopeless in times of hardship. We aren’t capable of surviving strife without a hand up from God. When we turn from God, we miss the buoy that God sends to keep up afloat in times of trouble. Isaiah 40:21–31 invites us to put our hope in God so that God will renew our strength for the battles in our own lives and the battles for peace, fairness, and justice for all people. Thanks be to God.

**Response:** “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (VU 670)

**Prayers of the People:**

God of Our Lives, we come as a broken and confused people before your throne. We come as a people who have all, somewhere along the line, been victims of wicked and greedy earthly powers. We have been fooled to think that we are superior to one another, and we have acted upon that belief in one way or another. Grant us wisdom and clarity as we find ways to enter into or maintain relationships with our Black siblings and cousins this month. Give us the opportunity to get to know each other through service and dialogue. Soothe us from the awkward conversations that we will pursue in the name of togetherness and understanding.

God of the World, be with all peoples throughout the nations as they struggle with concepts that are both familiar and unfamiliar to us. We raise to you our migrant siblings and cousins in Libya who have been exploited and sold into slavery. We raise to you their loved ones—spouses, parents, and children—who wait for them to return, but who may wait in vain. We raise those who are weary from war, starving from famine, broken from sexual exploitation and violence. May they know you as the One who will renew their strength. God of the World, whisper our love to them, and grant us ways to aid them in their difficult time.

God of the Universe, we bring ourselves to your feet. We are facing different hardships at the moment, but just as you know the makeup of each starry host, so too are you aware of who we are, and what we are facing. Activate your hope within us so that we may rely on the strength and comfort you offer. We ask all this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Hymn:** “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” (VU 651)

**Blessing and Sending Forth:** Did you get all that? Do you know now? May your hope grow in the Lord, may you walk and not be weary, may you be raised up on eagle’s wings, now and forevermore. Amen.

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