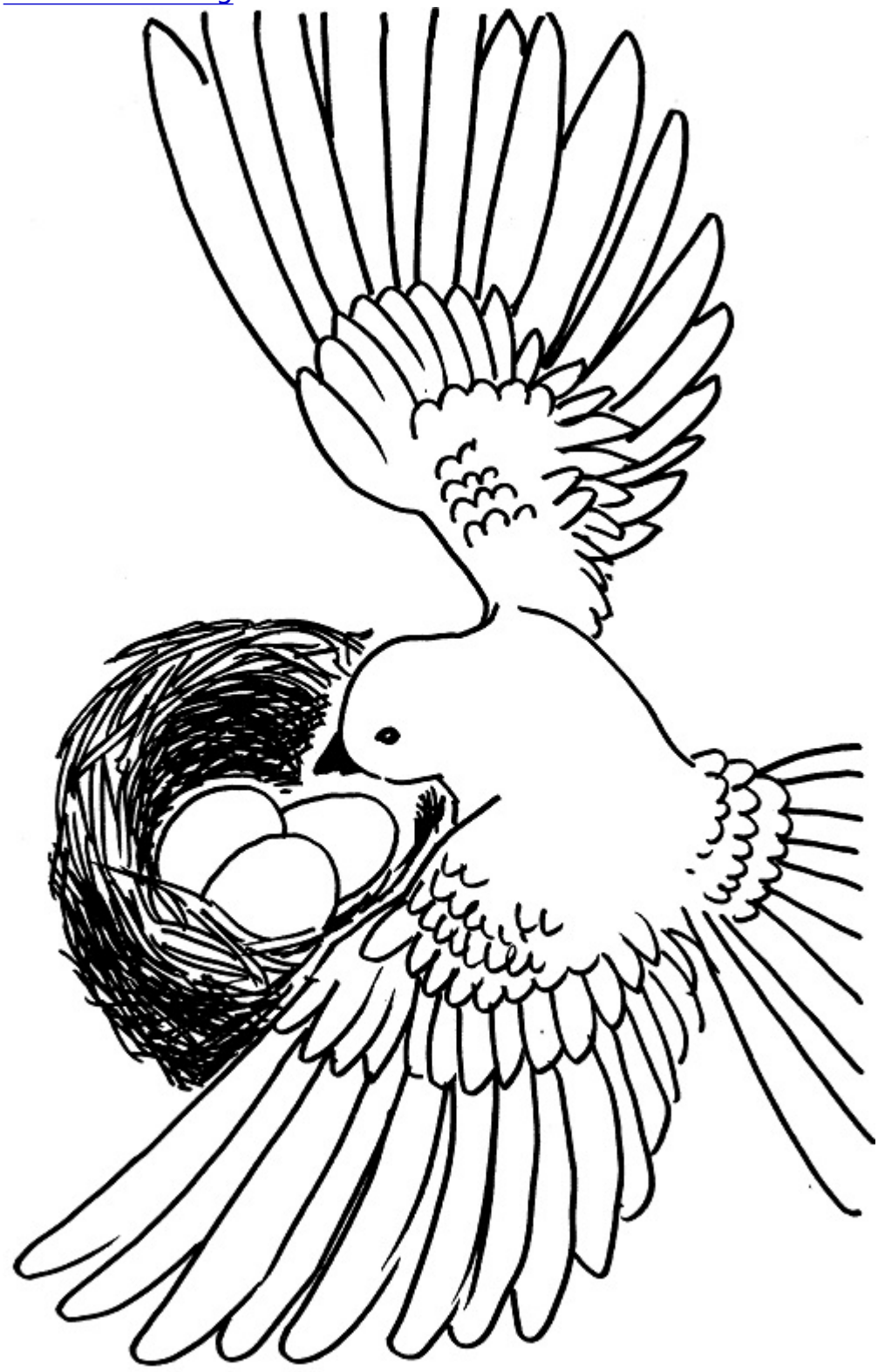
Spirituality

Pencil Preaching





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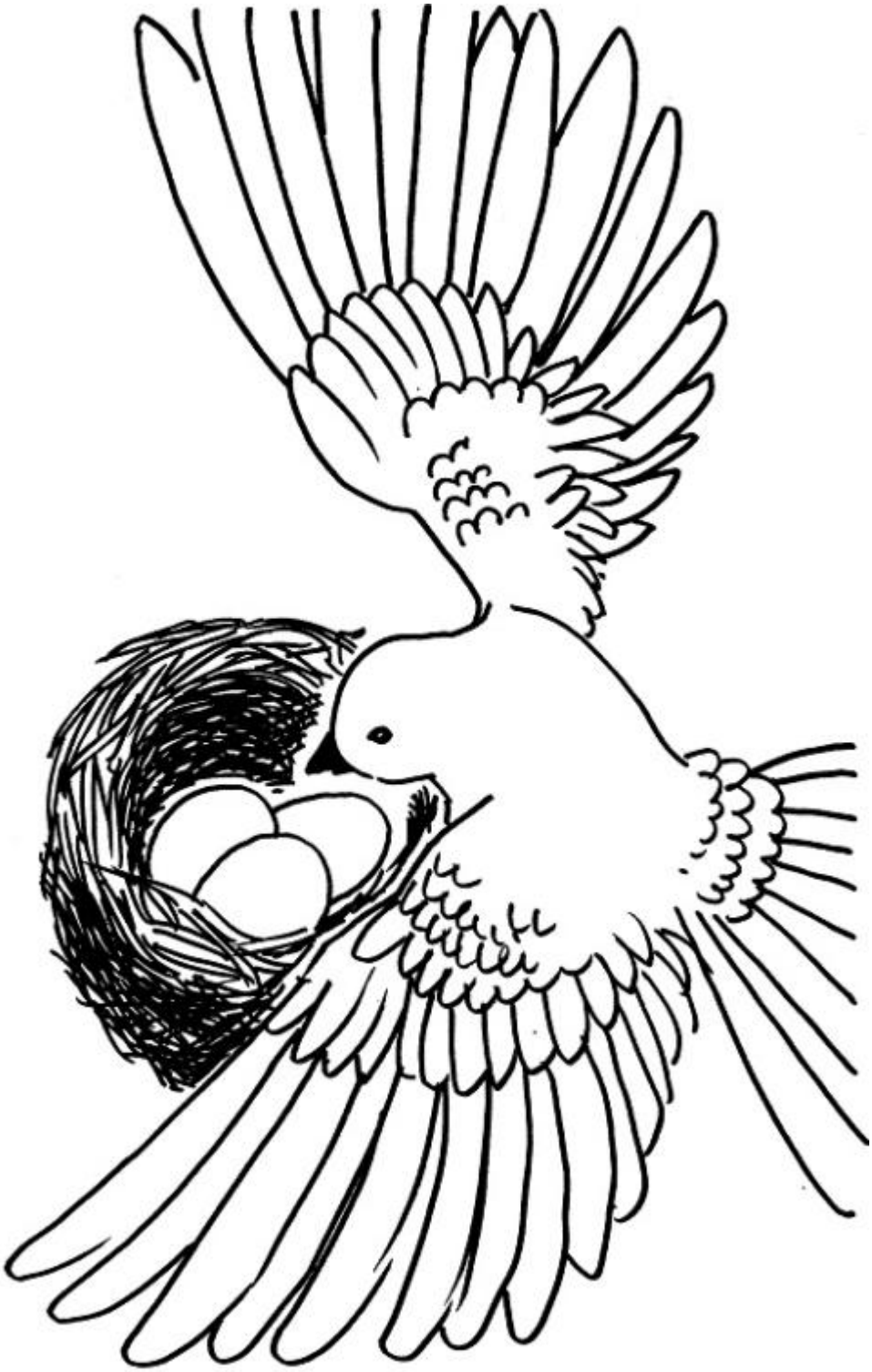

“You will grieve, but your grief will become joy” (John 16:20).

Acts 18:9-18; Jn 16:20-23

We live in the promise of the Holy Spirit, and this gives a long context to our hopes even in the midst of great sorrow and suffering. Pentecost will fall this year in the

middle of the killing war in Ukraine and in the terrible shadow of the murders of 19 children and their teachers in Texas, the latest mass shooting in the United States.

The pain parents and communities feel right now makes us all witnesses to a national tragedy we have yet to address. The loss of a precious child or a loved one, especially in a pointless way, can only be met if we believe that they will be restored when “God wipes away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more” (Rev 21:4). Until then, they live in our hearts as voices eager to share what they now know.

At the Last Supper, Jesus tried to prepare his disciples not just for his death, but for his death by crucifixion, a prolonged and terrifying method of killing someone by slow asphyxiation. To stand by the cross and watch helplessly while your beloved is tortured to death was the ultimate mockery of human hope. Jesus wanted the disciples to survive this suffering with hope. He chooses the example of a woman in childbirth who endures great pain to bring a new life into the world. It is a direct reversal of his own murder. It restores instead of destroys. It is the primal act of human hope, to give life in the midst of self-sacrificing love.

Jesus in effect calls his death the prelude to new life. He comforts his disciples with the promise that death will not end his life but only amplify it with enormous joy. He will leave them in anguish, but then return to them in glory. Physical death cannot stop his rebirth into the New Creation, an eternal life that will begin their own promised passage through death to life with God. Knowing this, they can go fearlessly into the world to proclaim an ultimate victory over injustice and cruelty, murder and mayhem and the empty nihilism of despair and self-destruction.

St. Paul lived his missionary life with the knowledge of his own inevitable death before him. He endured threats, arrests, beatings, shipwreck, starvation and rejection to complete his preaching work. He ends his life, we believe, in Rome, under house arrest awaiting decapitation at the orders of the insane Nero. Yet, his joy was never taken away. He lived in Christ, his intimate friend and savior, a foreshadowing of his own transformation.

Pentecost responds to evil and death with grace and life. The Holy Breath is everywhere, filling every creature with wonder and joy. The Spirit is unstoppable in its power to renew and restore. The Spirit sustains not only human life but also the seeking mind and longing heart. We move with God intimately, as friends walking in

the cool of the evening. We find infinite solace and comfort in our God, who knows and reveals all things.

Come, Holy Spirit. Heal our broken hearts and renew us with your peace and in the fire of your love.

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