

April 23rd, 2017: Emerge: Coming Out Into the Light



Last week, we introduced a new series, called “Emerge” and how the metaphor of the Butterfly emerging from a cocoon has been connected with Christ’s resurrection for years. We looked at how that cocoon time, the time in the protective darkness, while sometimes painful and uncomfortable in the moment, can bring forth growth and transformation within us – just as it does for a caterpillar transitioning into a butterfly... and just as it did for Jesus after his crucifixion – death giving way to the resurrected Lord who emerged from the tomb.

Over the next few weeks, we will continue to unpack this image of the emerging butterfly – looking carefully at each stage in its transition from enclosed within the cocoon to soaring on strong and beautiful wings. Today, we’ll look closely at the first stage of breaking free, as the new butterfly struggles to push out of its confines, producing a fissure that cannot be undone.

While I’ve never had the pleasure of watching a butterfly emerge, there are some great websites that help you to see in up close and walk you through what’s going on in each stage. So, after the caterpillar encloses itself in what’s technically called a chrysalis, it hangs from a branch for about a week and a half while the metamorphosis takes place. Once the butterfly has completed its development and is ready to emerge, it comes to a point where what was once protecting it from harm, giving it the space to transform from caterpillar to butterfly, that shield of the chrysalis now acts as a prison, binding it where it no longer belongs. If for some reason the butterfly cannot escape, the cocoon of transformation becomes instead a tomb of death; thus, the struggle of breaking free is now at hand.

In the videos I’ve seen of the metamorphosis of a monarch, you can clearly see when the butterfly is ready to emerge... the once green chrysalis “shell” has become transparent, revealing the beautiful colors of the encased wings crammed inside. And then, the butterfly’s head, which is hanging down at the bottom of the cocoon pushes down and out with enough force that it creates a break, a crack, a fissure in the outer shell. Within a few minutes, the caterpillar utilizing the force of gravity, carefully slides out the bottom of the chrysalis. Once the whole butterfly has slipped out of the enclosure, it’s now dangling, pulled down by the weight of the beautiful and still wet wings, desperately clinging to the remains of the chrysalis. It slowly makes its way, crawling up the empty shell of a cocoon until it is on solid ground, securely resting on the branch or surface from which the caterpillar hung at the beginning of the transition.

We’ll talk more about the next stages (preparing for flight and then taking off) in the coming weeks, but what just happened... the breaking free... the coming out into the light... THAT’S HARD WORK! It takes time to rest and recuperate after that kind of ordeal! And not only is it hard work... it’s scary too. That butterfly is choosing to leave the confines of safety, security... of all it has ever known as a winged creature... to enter the unknown, new world, and all it has to offer.

It's not an unfamiliar story is it? Experiencing transformation within a safe space, only to feel bound, trapped by the very thing that served to protect you in the first place. Our scripture lesson today has a story like that. Jesus, the leader of this movement within Judaism, has been ruffling feathers all over the Judean countryside and even into Jerusalem. The disciples, after traveling from town to town following this preacher and teacher, healer and prophet, come face to face with the reality of his death... with the fact that Jesus' passion and ministry got him killed, that the Jewish leaders incited the people so intensely that those who had once yelled "Hosanna" turned to demand, "Crucify him!" All of this is still fresh in the disciple's minds when they hear the news that Jesus has risen from the grave... that he's been seen and that this resurrected Lord is coming to visit with them next. And what do the disciples do? Do they run out to greet Jesus? Do they go out in the city streets to tell the news of victory over death? No... they meet in secret and lock the doors... they enclose themselves, we're told, "for fear of the Jews." This new world, as it has been revealed to them, is a scary place. They are fearful for their own lives... will the Jewish leaders call for their deaths next? Who will be the next to be crucified alongside criminals?

When the disciples meet the risen Lord, when he walks right into their locked room, he immediately senses their fear and says, "Peace be with you" ... twice he says that... "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Fear of coming out from their seclusion, of stepping out from behind the locked doors that kept them safe, was making them prisoners. Jesus steps right into that place of fear and beckons them to emerge from the prisons to serve God, to continue Jesus' ministry, his work of love sharing and light bearing, of healing and justice.

Our fears have a powerful way of binding us, don't they? We, like the disciples, don't need to be wrapped up in a physical cocoon to experience their binding power. When we're afraid, we close ourselves off, wrap ourselves tightly in whatever we can find to protect us and there we sit, imprisoned by our fears. And it is into that space, into that darkness that Jesus speaks... "Peace be with you." He spoke it to his disciples in that locked room, and still today, Christ speaks it to us... "Peace be with you." May your fears slip away... may you have the strength and power to break out of that which encloses you, to be free to come out into the light!

So often we hear the phrase "coming out" associated with the LGBTQ community "coming out" of the closet and being open and honest about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, not only with themselves but the world around them. Stepping out of the prison of pretending they're something they're not. I was reading some powerful coming out poetry this week from the LGBTQ community... poems that captured the sense of imprisonment; the fear of consequences for being themselves; the isolation, anxiety, and depression from being closeted.

While "coming out" is a powerful image for the LGBTQ community, it is equally powerful for all, as we – each one of us – wraps layers of protection and careful walls around ourselves and our hearts so as to not let anyone in who will hurt or destroy us. We are all called to hear the words of Jesus spoken to the disciples in that locked room... "Peace be with you... As my father has sent me, so I send you." Peace... first and ways peace... Christ calls us to be at peace with ourselves, with who we are, trusting that God doesn't

make mistakes. And peace enough to quell our fears, to allow us to unlock the doors that enclose us, to break out of the cocoon that binds us, and to live fully and freely into the light of day, the light of Christ that shines love on each one of us. And as we come out into the light, we come to realize that this light is also within each one of us, it's God's light of love that illumines our hearts and lives so completely that we become a source of that light for others --- and so we sing, THIS LITTLE LIGHT OF MINE – because this light, Christ's light DOES shine in us... if we free it to do so.