

April 21, 2019
Easter Sunday

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The Butterfly Effect

Isaiah 65:17-25 The peaceable kingdom.

17For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. 18But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight. 19I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. 20No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. 21They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. 23They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. 24Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear. 25The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

It has become conventional practice preachers to lecture the congregation on Easter about lapses in attendance - to say something rude like, "I want to wish you a pleasant Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Happy Labor Day and Thanksgiving, because I won't be seeing many of you until Christmas." I am not about to do that. Because, I, like the staff, officers and membership of this congregation am glad you're here. I like the way Peter Gomes (Pastor of Harvard University's Memorial Church) puts it to the C & E crowd. "You are in the right place at the right time."

You are in the right place today. Not because the music is great and the flowers beautiful, the scene sensational, but because what is pronounced here today is literally a matter of life and death, maybe it is best put as – a matter of life in the midst of death.

John 20:1-18

20Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. 2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." 3Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4The two were running together,

but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. 6Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, 7and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. 8Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; 9for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. 10Then the disciples returned to their homes.

Prayer for Illumination: God of Life, we come to church on Easter morning and let its old and familiar words of hope fall again on our ears. We don't ask that they be emptied of their mystery. We ask only that we might stand under their wonder, even if we cannot completely comprehend them.

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

Introduction

Three people stand before St. Peter at the gates of heaven. They each have to answer one question. If they fail, they go to the other place for eternity. St. Peter asks the first person: "What happens at Christmas?" She answers: "Christmas is a holiday where a man in a red suit gives presents to children and flies on a sled from the North Pole." Peter looked upon her and said, "You have left out the birth of Jesus," He pulled on a great lever, and, poof, the cloud opened with a chute to never-after, and heat rose from the chute as the first person dropped away into the abyss. The second person was asked, "What happens on Maundy Thursday," to which he responded: "On Maundy Thursday folks gather for a great supper -- of turkey and sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie and they watch football and shop for Christmas." Saint Peter reached for the lever and said, "You have your Thursdays confused, and you've forgotten Jesus." The lever was pulled, and poof, the second person was gone.

The third person stepped forward, Saint Peter at this point, perturbed and impatient asked, "Can you tell me about Easter?" And she replied, "Easter is the holiday that remembers a righteous man." St. Peter said yes. "This man traveled far and wide and taught and healed amidst a group of supporters and friends." Saint Peter smiled and nodded. "But this man was scorned and executed and thrown in a cave, yet on the third day the cave was opened." "Go on," said Peter.. And the woman continued: "The man came out into the light, and if he sees his shadow there are six more weeks of winter."

Don't' feel bad, even Clergy can't get it right. Really! We scour through files, scrambling, searching, reading old standard texts and anything new we can get our hands on in order to find a new way to say what we've been trying to say for years, trying, straining the limits of language, to put it plainly, to find the right words to describe something that is the most astonishing good news, the best news in the world, in fact; news that is simply bigger, better, and more glorious than any of the ways we have tried to tell it. Because this truth is so big and so important not one of us is up to understanding it, let alone describing it, by ourselves; we celebrate with our great hymns because we can always sing more than we can say and with flowers, eloquent bearers of creation's beauty and God's rejoicing with us in the fundamental goodness of the world.

I have never offered an Easter meditation drawing upon the symbol of creation's beauty -- the caterpillar, the chrysalis (cocoon), and the butterfly; even though they are, in fact,

ancient Christian symbols of renewal, rebirth, and resurrection.

But, maybe, they too, as eloquent bearers of creation's beauty can help us get a grasp on this wondrous event, and somehow get it right.

STAGES

The wonder of nature giving rise to the spread of butterfly wings follows several cycles beginning with an egg or larva. It hatches into a caterpillar; then attaches to a twig or leaf. It is upon a leaf they spin a protective silk case or chrysalis -- most of us call it a cocoon. In the final cycle, a complete change, total transformation, called metamorphosis, takes place and something new and different emerges from the cocoon. The caterpillar is reconstituted and reborn. It becomes a new thing, but the old thing is not lost. It is an astonishing wonder of nature. But we are not here to talk about bugs or biology.

This cycle and the symbolism of it resonates anew for me this Easter. In order to emerge from the chrysalis, in order to enable a new birth of beauty and wonder, the caterpillar must first be entirely broken, even destroyed. The caterpillar, in essence, experiences its own Good Friday.

FAITH

Faith is like a butterfly in a cocoon. Consider the cocoon an obstacle of sorts put in place by nature. The organism inside must struggle and overcome it in order to become stronger. The butterfly's wings gain strength as they push, pull; force and flex trying to break out. In our lives it seems as if there are so many conditions that seem to conspire to constrict us. Terrorism, disasters, world events, the utter non-sense we see unfolding on the political landscape sometimes surrounds us to the point that it feels like we are confined ... cocooned, en-tombed.

STRUGGLE

Folks, faith is an ongoing struggle amid obstacles. Faith forces, flexes, pushes, pulls in its effort to seek understanding. It's a wrestle; it's a give and take; strain and stretch; wrench and reach kind of thing. It requires effort and exertion. It isn't always easy. If it were easy it wouldn't be called faith. In a world seemingly cocooned by unbearable grief, alienation, violence, hatred, unkind words. We struggle. We as people of faith are in the midst of struggle. Easter reminds us that God has the ultimate answer. God has the last word, the right word, and the final word, and that word is life.

This is especially powerful and poignant for me and my family. It will be 22 years ago, this coming Saturday – that on a beautiful spring Saturday my brother James Brian's single engine Piper Tri-Pacer Airplane crashed. An outcome of that inferno was that he was shepherded across the unknown canyon that separates time from eternity. Our family's central and solitary source of consolation emerged out of the promise of Easter. This consolation comes not from wishful thinking, fantasy or philosophic conjecture. It comes from faith. It comes because God's self-revelation in Christ Jesus is not fiction but fact.

If God, our Creator, can make changes in the life of an insect, think about what God can do for us in Jesus Christ. Jesus overcame the cross; rose from the tomb; He shed those funeral linens like a butterfly sheds its cocoon. He was raised after three days. He spread His metaphorical wings and took flight from death. Death could not hold him. A tomb could not hold Him.

Easter is about Jesus, and all of these things are true of him. But Easter is also about us. Butterflies are bugs. Beautiful, it's true, but insects, whereas we — every one of us — are created in the very image of God. If we want to see true beauty, we need look inward, where the seed of resurrection life has been planted in us

BUTTERFLY EFFECT

That is why I've titled this meditation the Butterfly Effect. It's not my phrase. The term was first used by American mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz (1917-2008). He based his thoughts on the so called "chaos theory." (I don't know a whole lot about "chaos theory" most likely because I seem to live my life in "chaos reality." There is no theory to it.) He believed in the "sensitive dependence on initial conditions"; where a small change at one place can result in large differences for subsequent circumstances. The name of his theory is derived from the theoretical example that a butterfly's wings might create tiny changes in the atmosphere that may ultimately alter the path of a tornado or delay, accelerate or even prevent the occurrence of a tornado in another location. The flapping wing represents a small change in the initial condition of the system, which causes a chain of events leading to large-scale alterations in circumstances. It's the domino effect; the pebble in a pond phenomenon. Had the butterfly not flapped its wings, the trajectory of the system might have been vastly different. The underlying premise is that there is no such thing as an individual choice. What we do, what we choose to do, how we do what we do has an effect on others. Every choice we make, every action we take, is subject to, contributes toward, the butterfly effect. Your actions can have more positive consequences than you think. That's one reason you are invited to take some milkweed seed and plant it for more butterfly habitat.

CONCLUSION

Church of Scotland minister and preacher Kathy Galloway, in an Easter sermon stated, "The place of the gospel is never abstract or academic, nor is it theoretical and dogmatic; it is always the place of engagement with the world." The stone has been rolled away. The struggle has been overcome, the victory won. The confines of the cocoon intended to contain him lie in wrinkled shreds. The tomb is empty. He has spread His wings. He has gone ahead to Galilee where he waits for us to overcome the struggle, spread our wings and fearlessly follow.

Prayer

Lord God, in Jesus Christ you have made it known that there is nothing is beyond Your mighty reach; Neither evil, nor hardship, nor death. And may the same Christ, who lives forever, free us from our fears, be the source of our new life, keep our hearts rejoicing and our eyes on the prize of promise, possibility and hope, today, tomorrow and always. Amen.

Children distribute milkweed seed...