

**Sermon: On Metamorphosis**  
**Scripture: Romans 8:12-25**  
**Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans**  
**Date: May 23, 2010**

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A boy had a caterpillar in a little aquarium that he had been watching and was thrilled when one morning he awoke and found it tucked into a tight little cocoon. It was only about a week and half before the boy happen to catch sight of the struggle going on inside the cocoon. The newly formed butterfly was trying to break through the silky chrysalis. The boy could not resist the urge to help so he reached in and tore the cocoon to release the butterfly. But he was troubled by what he saw – a distended, overly large body and crumpled wings and before long it was apparent that the almost-butterfly was not going to survive. It turns out, so the boy learned later, that the very struggle that is involved in the butterfly breaking out of its cocoon is what facilitates the movement of the hemolymph throughout the butterfly’s body which completes the metamorphosis of this worm into one of the most beautiful insects in the world. Without the struggle, though, out of its captivity it can’t become fully itself.

This is a perfect visual image for Paul’s words in Romans that we read this morning. “I consider that the sufferings of this current time are not worth comparing to the glory about to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18) This he is saying to a community of Christ followers who are struggling immensely with remaining true to their faith despite the fact that they are being persecuted by the Roman culture around them and the the religious authorities as well.

Paul makes the direct connection between their struggle and suffering and Christ’s. “We suffer with Christ so that then we may be glorified with him as well.” (8:17) It’s this strange but essential principle of Christian spirituality that suffering and struggle can be transformational; the cross leads to resurrection; the suffering in the wilderness prepares us for entering the promised land. Our suffering can be the great source of redemption. The temptation is always to run for the exit when we are in situations of great struggle and pain, leap for the escape hatch to lessen the suffering and surely there are situations where such a response is the best one, but there are other situations, and maybe many more of these situations than we would care to admit, where

what is needed is patience; patience within the current suffering and struggle in order to find out how the metamorphosis – which we can't fathom is a part of what is happening - is actually taking place. But it often takes just holding on well beyond our comfort zone; holding on intentionally and consciously with an eye and ear and heart out for how we and others are being grown through it.

It's quite counter-cultural, what our faith asks of us, in this quick-fix culture of ours that celebrates whatever is the latest pain-relieving, comfort-producing, efficiency-increasing technology which can release us from having to sit too long in any one place for too long. But we all know (don't we?) that the deeper and more important things in life cannot be hurried but at most can only be nurtured and waited upon with patience. The growth of our inner selves necessarily involves the painful push through the tough chrysalis of experience and we rush it at our own peril or stagnancy.

But look where Paul also takes this letter of his to the Romans. There aren't many places in our New Testament scripture, I have to say, where the things of the earth, of the environment are brought into theological teaching but here is a powerful one. He says "for creation itself waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (8:19-21)

Paul makes this link between the transformation, the redemption of us as children of God and the redemption of creation itself. This I find so poignant and powerful especially today as we sit here for worship and the pipe in Gulf of Mexico continues to belch oil into ocean. If there is any doubt that the human being needs to be transformed and that creation is awaiting that transformation with an "inward groan", as Paul says, then this oil spill should remove it. Cause what becomes evident is that creation suffers for our sinfulness. Creation suffers because of our rush not to suffer. As we race for more comfort and more speed and more efficiency; as we rush to live longer and to suffer less, creation pays the price. As the oily waves lap up into marshes and onto beaches and suffocate the marine life within it, we have to NOW make this connection. Could this weeping of the wounded earth help us to finally awaken to the COST of much of these

unnecessary things that we want and believe we need? Could this very present suffering of the earth inspire us to change, slow down, be more patient and intentional about the pace and weight of our lives?

Back to the text – at one point Paul says: “the freedom of the glory of the children of God shall one day be obtained” (8:21). This is a much richer notion of freedom than we are used to understanding. It is not “freedom” in the sense that we can do whatever we want whenever we want. It’s not the freedom to chose this brand of toothpaste over that brand of toothpaste or this car over that car or this politician over that politician. That is one level of freedom but only a very superficial one. We cannot be truly FREE and liberated until we are truly and fully our authentic selves and to be truly ourselves as human beings we must be in right relationship as children of God to the created world of which we are a part. I am not simply free because I do not live under an oppressive political system, rather I am free as a human being with a soul if/when I do not have to live over and against others, when my good is not at someone or something else’s expense, when my happiness or satisfaction does not come at the expense of someone else’s sorrow or dissatisfaction. And why is that? Because, we are taught first by the Jewish tradition and then by our own Christian tradition that this is the way we and the world was made. We are intricately interconnected to one another and to this earth, we are one body, and so we cannot be fully ourselves, we cannot even pretend we are free if we are not in right relationship with the people and things around us. We are a people and land of the free only when we are bounded on all sides by right relationship, otherwise we are determined, constrained, enslaved necessarily to “decay” and “futility”, to use the words of Paul.

And I wonder if we in our society aren’t particularly blind to or in denial of our enslavement to decay because outwardly we have defined freedom as having lots of choices and not being imprisoned or controlled by our government and being able to do whatever we want at whatever cost it takes to do it. And as we are celebrating this kind of freedom we hardly even notice the oily waters that are beginning to rise at first around our ankles, then our knees, (“we are free”) our hips, then our chests (“we are free”) and up to our throats... until finally we can’t celebrate our freedom anymore because the air

in our lungs has been replaced by the oil that such freedom has released from the bowels of the earth....

“For creation awaits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God...” and who are the children of God? Could they be those of us who are willing to freely chose sacrifice for the sake of right relations, those who have the courage and strength to chose the less convenient, the less speedy-quick, the more patient and often painful road of deeper transformation so that the worm of the human race can become finally the butterfly of true humanity!