

When we lived at our house in Culpeper, Virginia one of my hobbies was working out in the yard. I even tried my hand at gardening. Now it must be known that I do not have a green thumb. So often I would finish weeding and feel so accomplished and such a sense of pride. Then, the next day I would be so defeated as the weeds kept coming back over and over and over again. It is sad to say, but eventually I gave up on tending that small garden in the front yard, not knowing what to do to stop the weeds.

So often in our lives our response is to give up when we feel we have hit a wall, when we feel we have been doing the same thing over and over again with the same results.

It is the weeds in our life that stop us from doing new things. Weeds are interesting plants. Most of the time they are easy to spot, but other times they are so beautiful they blend in with the surrounding flowers camouflaging their true nature. Weeds are intelligent and sneaky. Their goal is to choke out the life of the living plants around them so that they can live. Their root systems overwhelm surrounding plants and they take over spreading at a very rapid pace.

This is what sin does; it sneaks into our lives in ways that we may not be aware of until we find ourselves consumed and paralyzed. With God’s help we combat this sin. We repent, we ask God to rid us of the nuisance of sin, and yet time and time again we feel like it keeps creeping back in.

Something has to change. We have to do something different if we really want to live into the new life and hope that Jesus Christ is promising us.

I have always had the utmost respect for Jesus’ disciples. They knew there was something different about Jesus Christ and they immediately followed him without any questions, with Jesus’ simple invitation of “Come and see.”<sup>i</sup> In that moment, their lives completely changed. They left everything familiar to follow Jesus and they entered into a new life.

They were blessed to have Jesus with them to teach them everything he could about God’s love and God’s healing. He modeled for them how to be disciples, how to pray, how to heal, and how to treat other people. Although the true test for the disciples would come after Jesus Christ’s resurrection.

We see in our Scripture for today from the Gospel of John Jesus told the disciples that he would not be with them forever and he gave them the most important information they would need.

He said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples” (John 13:34-35).

As disciples of Christ we are known as we embody the love of Jesus Christ to everyone we encounter. This is a hard commandment to follow, as we are not always in the mood to exhibit the love of Christ.

Like weeds, sin creeps into our lives and we judge other people based off their appearance. We think we know them. We categorize them and put them into boxes. We are fearful of “the other.” And yet, Jesus calls us to let go of our fears, to let go of our preconceived notions and to love everyone.

We only have one life, so we have to give it all we’ve got for the glory of God. The interesting thing about us as humans is that we have a hard time trying new things. We are comfortable with the way things are. New things seem difficult, scary, and annoying.

We are not alone. So many people in the Bible were afraid to try new things.

Moses did not want to be a public speaker and the leader of the Israelites. The disciple Peter was afraid to walk on water because he had never tried it before. The disciple Thomas had a hard time believing that Jesus had been risen from the dead even though the other disciples had seen him with their own eyes.

At the moment we believe in Jesus Christ and are justified in our faith, we start our new life with Christ: a life of hope. In this moment we begin a relationship with God that never ends, and we are promised resurrection and everlasting life.

Every funeral I have ever presided over I have read the passage from Revelation 21 that we heard this morning. That upon our earthly death we are promised a place where “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more...” (Revelation 21:4). This is a beautiful promise of our faith that ensures us eternal hope.

**The good news for our lives today is that new life is not something we have to wait for. It is something that can happen right now.**

The apostle Paul was trying to explain this kind of new life to the church at Corinth. He told them, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17).

One of my favorite illustrations of new life is the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Ever since I went on my own Chrysalis Flight as a youth, which is like an Emmaus weekend for youth, I have been obsessed with butterflies. During this retreat I experienced the living God through music, talks, agape love, and truly felt for the first time that God loved even me and had a purpose for my life. The mascot for this weekend was a butterfly. To this day every time I see a butterfly I smile and am reminded of God’s invitation to new life.

Recently, I was at a retreat and my friend and colleague, Rev. Meredith McNabb shed more light on what really happens to a caterpillar before they become a butterfly. Up until her sermon I had always thought that when the caterpillar entered the cocoon or chrysalis, that they just received some new parts and became a butterfly. I thought they kept part of their caterpillar self for their body and sprouted wings, but I soon learned this was not the case.

What my friend Meredith shared that day in her sermon were the indisputable facts about this process of transformation and on that day my pretty and inspiring metaphor of new life was shattered. Yet from the ashes arose in me a new appreciation of my favorite illustrations for new life.

So here is what really happens to caterpillars as they become a butterfly. Much of this information I am about to share with you is from numerous scientific articles which are referenced in my sermon manuscript.<sup>ii</sup> The little caterpillar or “larva” is hatched from an egg and is really hungry. So, it eats a lot and sheds its skin on numerous occasions so it can grow larger and longer. Then “one day, the caterpillar stops eating, hangs upside down from a twig or leaf and...molts itself into a shiny chrysalis...”

The most interesting part of the story is what happens in that cocoon or chrysalis. There is struggle and there is new life. What happens next is a little crazy and a little gross. The caterpillar which is now in the “pupa” stage actually begins to digest itself and it turns into caterpillar soup.

What is amazing is within the broken down caterpillar soup are a few “imaginal discs” for each body part needed for the butterfly. Some parts of the caterpillar are still preserved to be combined with these new cells to make a butterfly. It really is a blending of the old and the new.

Dr. Lincoln Brower explains, “... literally the entire internal contents of the caterpillar — the muscles, the entire digestive system, even the heart, even the nervous system — is totally rebuilt.”<sup>iii</sup>

You see when the caterpillar is in the chrysalis it must die to life the way it was lived before, so that new life can spring forth. Yet hidden in the chrysalis is the promise of new life from only a couple of cells...this process truly is a miracle.

**The good news for us today is when we give up our lives of sin, lives that have become comfortable for us, we can grow in the newness of life with Jesus Christ.**

So what are we waiting for?

I think we all desperately want this newness of life, yet so many things seem to get in the way: fear, busyness, expectations of others, simple routines, and the demands of life. Even the more serious things like addiction, depression, grief, broken relationships, and serious debt. We are afraid to take a leap of faith and truly trust God with our children, our money, and our very lives.

How can we be transformed and ultimately how can we be restored?

The Apostle Paul really helps us focus on the things that are important in this life. He kept explaining to the church at Corinth that they were called to celebrate their new life in Christ instead of spending a majority of their time arguing amongst themselves.

This kind of conflict that Paul was addressing continues on in our lives and our churches today. Like weeds, conflict strangles us with anxiety and kills us spiritually. I don't know about you, but when I conflict with someone, I spend a majority of my time thinking about it and miss out on the beautiful blessings all around me.

Every day, Jesus Christ is calling us to a new thing, a new life. This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. The Holy Spirit sustains us as we continue to live into the new life that Christ has offered to us. The Holy Spirit gives us guidance and direction on how to confront the conflict in our lives, while honoring that each person we encounter is a child of God.

What kind of new thing is Christ calling you to? It is a new friendship, a new hobby, a new way to serve your church, or a new ministry? I would love to hear from you any new idea you have for us as the church to share God's love with the community.

Jesus Christ is calling us to new life and hope every day. God is calling us to surrender, so God can cut away the weeds of sin in our life so we can continue to grow into the disciples God is calling us to be. May we continue to live into this newness of life today and always. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> NRSV. John 1:39.

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/caterpillar-butterfly-metamorphosis-explainer/>

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.