

After the long season of Lent, I am so delighted to say to you today “Alleluia! He is risen!” And to hear you say back, “The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

Last night at our Great vigil of Easter, we heard Matthew’s version of what happened on the Day of Resurrection. Today we hear from Luke. Those of you who have been studying parallels in the synoptic Gospels will find both differences and similarities between the two. In both versions, it was the women who went to the tomb very early in the morning to care for the body of their beloved Jesus, the man they had loved and followed. And in both versions, the women found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, the body was gone, and there was already someone else there—two men in Luke’s version, but only one according to Matthew. Luke expands the story by reminding the women of the words Jesus had used to tell them what would happen to him and asks them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” In both versions, the women are told that he is not in the tomb but has risen, and they, in turn go to tell the apostles. Regardless of how the story is told, here is what we should know and remember: Our Lord is not in the tomb because he has risen from the dead. And *we* are to go away from the tomb that has broken open on this day and tell others the Good News.

This is a day of New Life. That’s what we profess to believe and it is why we’re here to celebrate. Our hopes have been answered in the assurance that we, too, will be raised from the dead. Yet we live somewhere between this life and the life in the world to come, and if we’re truthful, we often find it easier to live in this life than in the hope of the next one. Sharing the Good News is sometimes hard for us. So we use symbols and stories and traditions to share God’s story with others.

For example, today there will be Easter egg hunts in churches all over our country and the world, just as there is at St. Francis. One of my slightly irreverent colleagues shared some so-called “facts” to explain why Christians hunt Easter eggs. He mentioned that Jesus’ favorite food was scrambled eggs and we hunt them because Jesus is hungry. The rest of his facts are equally bad, so I’ll stop there. But as our St. Francis children already know, the egg is a symbol of resurrection; from its dormancy comes new life, just as from the dormancy of the tomb, our Lord was resurrected to new life and promised the same for us who believe in him.

Recently someone asked me about the connection between butterflies and Easter, and I believe I replied that the butterfly represents new life. Several days after that conversation I received an email with a story that describes this new life in a memorable way.

It’s the story of a woman, a preacher’s wife, who died suddenly and unexpectedly, leaving her grown children and other loved ones feeling that their lives together ended incompletely, unfinished. Despite her upbringing as a preacher’s kid, the woman’s daughter, Bethel, was so grief-stricken that she needed to receive repeated reassurances of God’s love and promises. As Easter approached, she longed for a visible, tangible metaphor of resurrection, just as so many of us do.

At the church Bethel attended, the Sunday school children raised mail-order caterpillars during Lent, in time for them to enter into the chrysalis stage and emerge as butterflies for an Easter morning release, probably like the butterfly release that will happen at the Methodist Church here in Rutherfordton after their Easter service this morning. Bethel decided to bring home three caterpillars and named two of them Dot and Mildred in memory of her great aunts. The third she called by her mother’s nickname, Pooky.

On Holy Saturday morning, Bethel’s children discovered that Mildred was now a butterfly, hanging beside her chrysalis. Later that day they watched in awe as Dot appeared. By Easter morning they

could see Pooky's orange and black wings within a transparent membrane breaking through her chrysalis and they hoped she would emerge soon so they could release her with Dot and Mildred during the Sunday school butterfly ceremony.

But on the way to church, perhaps traumatized by the trip in the moving car, Pooky trembled violently and struggled to break free. During Sunday school she became very still and her chrysalis blackened. She remained motionless on the drive home after church, and Bethel was saddened to think that the reassurance of the resurrection she had so desperately sought was not forthcoming.

That afternoon, as Bethel and her husband drove their children back to college, she couldn't stop thinking about Pooky and her dark, motionless chrysalis. "It's only a caterpillar. It doesn't matter that its name is Pooky," Bethel told herself. "What difference does it make? It doesn't change anything." And then it occurred to her that *she* had killed the butterfly, upsetting its emergence from the chrysalis by taking it to church. And she wondered whatever had possessed her to name it Pooky after her mother.

Those of us who have known the despair of grief won't be surprised to hear that she also began to question why God did that to her on Easter. "Doesn't God understand what I'm going through right now?" she thought. "Couldn't God take care of one stupid little butterfly?" She decided that the next morning she would take it into the woods and leave it. Perhaps the butterfly would emerge; but if it didn't, she wouldn't know, and her hope for it could remain intact.

That Easter evening, a movement in the butterfly cage caught Bethel's eye. And there sat a butterfly triumphantly fanning its wings. Bethel could see the signs of death and struggle under the chrysalis, but above it was this beautiful, living butterfly. The story ends there, but I imagine that Bethel rushed to tell her husband and to call her children to tell them that Pooky had emerged from her chrysalis, alive, strong, and beautiful. I can imagine her excitement and joy in the tangible metaphor of resurrection and new life that God had given her on that day.

There is something about new life that touches our hearts and our spirits. The women who followed Jesus learned that when they went to the tomb, found it empty, and were reminded of what he had told them: that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, be crucified, and on the third day rise again. They ran to tell the apostles—who didn't believe them—then Peter ran to the tomb and saw for himself that it was just as his Lord had foretold: despite his struggle, despite his suffering, despite his death, our Lord is risen and lives again. And he has promised the same for us, life everlasting, for all who believe in him.

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Happy Easter!