

Sermon 21.10.31

Romans 12: 1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Scholars Version of Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, friends, by the mercies of God, to dedicate every fiber of your being to a life that is consecrated and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world; do not accept the life of this age as your model, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is consistent with God's purposes —what is good, worthwhile and completely genuine.

Isaiah 25: 6-9

On this mountain,
YHWH will prepare for all peoples
a banquet of rich food,
a banquet of fine wines,
food rich and succulent,
and fine, aged wines.

On this mountain God will remove
the mourning veil covering all peoples,
the shroud covering all nations,
destroying all death forever.

God will wipe away
the tears from every cheek,
and will take away the shame
of God's people on earth, wherever they live.

YHWH has spoken.
On that Day it will be said,
"This is our God,
this is the One for whose liberation we waited,
YHWH is the One in whom we had hoped!
We rejoice exultantly in our deliverance,
for the hand of YHWH rests on this mountain!"

SERMON: [Power Point](#) that accompanies sermon.

Not long ago I was with a friend who was going through a terrible loss, and she used the image of the caterpillar in its chrysalis (SLIDE 2) to describe what was happening in her life and walk of faith. Caterpillars don't change, she said - they are **UNDONE**. Completely undone in the creation of a new life. (SLIDE 3)

That, I believe, is the essence of metanoia - the Greek word that is translated in our passage today as 'transformed', literally it means 'a change of mind'. (SLIDE 4) That transformation involves the loss of one thing in the creation of something new. And the loss of one thing to bring about something new involves grief. Transformation involves being **UNDONE**.

Let's look at our passage (SLIDE 5) through the metaphor of the caterpillar and their amazing journey of transformation.

A little background on the text, from the letter to the Romans: Just a few years before Paul wrote this letter, the Roman Emperor Claudius prohibited Jews from meeting in synagogues, and eventually expelled Jews from the city of Rome. While the entire Jewish population likely didn't leave - it's a time of change, persecution and upheaval for Jews and Jesus followers alike. So it's in that political context in which this letter was written and read by the community of believers.¹

Our text starts: (SLIDE 6)

I appeal to you therefore, friends, by the mercies of God, to dedicate every fiber of your being to a life that is consecrated and pleasing to God,

Dedicating every fiber of our being to a life rooted in God...aligned with God's ways.

Caterpillars don't just grow from one state into another (SLIDE 7) - like the life cycle of a tadpole into a frog. Theirs is total transformation. Total undoing.

"We are called to dedicate every fiber of our selves to a life pleasing to God."

Butterflies like the one Kathleen talked about don't build a cocoon - only a few moths do that.(SLIDE 8) Cocoons are like silky sleeping bags that cover the insect. That's different from a chrysalis, which is actually part of the caterpillar's own body.

When it's time for transformation to begin, when the caterpillar knows it's ready -(SLIDE 9) it ramps up production of a specific hormone which causes the caterpillar to cast off it's outer coating, sort of

¹ Dewey, A, Hoover, R, McGaughy L and Schmidt, D. 2010. *The Authentic Letters of Paul*. Polebridge Press.

like how a snake sheds its skin, and underneath is this hard shell similar to the exoskeleton of a beetle.

Every fiber of the being of that caterpillar is dedicated to change - transforming to the new life ahead.

What was before is no longer - once the chrysalis is formed, the past, the caterpillar, is gone, never to return.

Our text goes on: (SLIDE 10)

“Do not be conformed to this world; do not accept the life of this age as your model, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds...”

Transformation requires us to give up “the life of this age as our model” and to imagine something different.

Once the chrysalis is formed, the undoing begins. Enzymes within the caterpillar liquify almost all its being - tearing apart the digestive system, lungs and most other organs. (SLIDE 11)

But these enzymes don't quite tear apart the whole caterpillar. They leave key structures intact, like breathing tubes, and at the same time specialized cells called imaginal discs start waking up².

(SLIDE 12)

During the caterpillar's life, these imaginal discs were kept dormant by hormones, but once the transformation begins, the hormone levels drop, and the imaginal discs begin to build a butterfly.

(SLIDE 13)

Each disc continues the genetic material to create a different body part - starting from the inside out. After 1 week in the chrysalis, the digestive system is well on its way. (SLIDE 14) Within 2 weeks, the eyes, legs, wings and mouth are all in working order.

It's pretty miraculous how quickly this happens - each imaginal disc started out with only about 50 cells - and to create just a single wing it needs to grow about a thousand cells!

Imaginal discs - I love this term! What are the imaginal discs within us?

The imaginal discs were in the caterpillar all along, waiting for the right moment to be woken up, to be activated, and new life to grow.

The undoing of the caterpillar allowed the imaginal discs to come alive. For transformation to create something new.

What are the imaginal discs within us?

Our text calls us to- (SLIDE 15)

² [▶ What's Inside A Caterpillar 'Cocoon?'](#)

“be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is consistent with God’s purposes —what is good, worthwhile and completely genuine.”

Paul seems to be saying to the Romans: Allow an undoing; a dissolving of the old so the imaginal discs can come alive and you can know what God calls your new life to be.

We continue in a landscape of being **UNDONE**, don’t we? (SLIDE 16)

This time when what we’ve left behind isn’t coming back - no return to the caterpillar of 2019, and yet we aren’t ready to emerge from the chrysalis yet either.

We continue in this place of transformation (SLIDE 17) - where it can feel dark and cramped, waiting for the shell to be broken open and new life to emerge.

Transformation for us involves a letting go and change, and change usually involves grief. As part of our service today, we come remembering - remembering the losses in our lives -

the people who have died and gone before us

But also the countless other losses - for some health, physical losses, or increased anxiety..

Some of us have lost our sense of security

We’ve lost The ability to be together, without fear

Some have lost dreams of what could be, what might be

We continue in this place of transformation, waiting, hoping, remembering. (SLIDE 18)

Remembering is a key ‘imaginal disc’ we all hold.

Acknowledging and Allowing the feelings of loss and grief to be with us is part of the process of letting the old transform, to change, into the new reality. We need to grieve, not hide, from the change and losses that visit us.³

My friends - like the caterpillar in the chrysalis, there are countless imaginal discs that live in us. As followers of Christ we are summoned to transform, to leave the old behind and become something new.

And so we allow those imaginal discs to begin to be activated - for growth to continue, at its own pace.

Today, by remembering, grieving, we allow new realities to emerge.

Today, we allow the imaginal disc of remembering to come alive, as we honor, celebrate, name and remember our losses and the beauty that has gone before.

³ From “This Jungian Life Episode 185. Assessing Our psychic inheritance”

Confession: (SLIDE 19)

As we move into a time of confession and communion, I offer this final gift of the metamorphosis of the caterpillar -

Research suggests that butterflies and moths can remember their caterpillar days. In one study researchers trained caterpillars to associate a smell with an electric shock, causing them to move away when they smelled the odor. After metamorphosis, these caterpillars turned moths still avoided the scary smell. What else might they hold onto from their previous selves?

What do we hold onto? In our imperfect and ongoing transformation what do we carry on - ways of being that don't reflect God's unending love and vision for shalom...

Join me in a time of remembering, confessing and releasing our sins.

(SLIDE 20)

Before I take the body of Christ,
Before I share Christ's life in bread and cup,
I recognize those things I carry that don't reflect Christ's call to transformation
These I lay down.
(silent prayer)

(SLIDE 21)

The words of hope I often fail to give,
The gestures of kindness that are buried by pride,
The narrowness of vision and of mind.
These I lay down.
(silent prayer)

(SLIDE 22)

The forgetting of God's unending love
The forgetting of God's purposes
The desire to stay small, bound in the chrysalis, unwilling to be transformed
These I lay down.
(silent prayer)

(SLIDE 23)

Lord Jesus Christ, companion at this feast,
We ask you to meet us here
Reminding us of your never ending call to love
And to share in the celebration of life anew.
Amen.

(adapted from *Sing the Story* #172)

(SLIDE 24)

Communion:

Our reading from Isaiah 25 offers us a vision - an imaginal disc - this promise and hope that lives within us -

of the welcome banquet God will prepare for all peoples,
Where all the nations will come to eat and rejoice.⁴

And so we come to the table.

The table of Christ, where we eat this bread and drink this cup
To remember the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. We remember the undoing of Jesus.

We come to celebrate Christ's call to become a new creation,
united with Christ and with one another.

We come remembering the night that Jesus' gathered with his closest companions...
Took the bread saying... this is my body, everytime you eat, do so in remembrance of me.
Took the cup saying... this is my life, my blood, poured out for you.

Jesus invites us to wake up the imaginal disc within that knows, yes knows, that we are all beloved children of God. That we are all known and loved by God.

Jesus' invites us to the table - All who are hungry,
All who long for something, for change, for transformation, for new life.

This morning communion will come to you. You are invited to take a cup of juice and a gluten free cracker and hold it until all are served. Then we will partake together.

(once served)

My friends, the table is ready. The feast is here.
Come. Eat. Be fed by the One who transforms.

End communion with prayer/poem

⁴ [Lectionary column for November 7, All Saints B \(Isaiah 25:6–9\)](#)

I sometimes forget
that I was created for Joy.
My mind is too busy.
My Heart is too heavy
for me to remember
that I have been
called to dance
the Sacred dance of life.
I was created to smile
To Love
To be lifted up
And to lift others up.
O' Sacred One
Untangle my feet
from all that ensnares.
Free my soul.
That we might
Dance
and that our dancing
might be contagious.

- Hafiz -