

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

January 18, 2015

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, MD

Readings: Matthew 4: 1-17

“Come, Fly with Me”

Grace and peace to you from God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen

“This is my Son, the Beloved in whom I take delight.” That is what God the Father said as Jesus rose from the Jordan after his baptism. “This is my beloved” came from the second Psalm, written in celebration of a king’s coronation. “In whom I take delight” comes from Isaiah and what is called the first “Servant Song.” What Jesus and the rest of us are to hear God saying is that the Messiah, God’s Son is to be a servant king. How can that be? Isn’t that a contradiction? Kings are served not servants, aren’t they? It’s an important question — an identity question. Who are you Jesus? What kind of Messiah are you? What kind of God sent you?

The first thing we discover is that being God’s beloved does not exclude us from being tested or tempted or challenged. In the susceptibility of hunger and isolation, Jesus must decide whether to be God’s Beloved or someone else.....he must choose whether to be God’s Word in flesh or someone else’s version of God’s Son. The Adversary comes into Jesus’ vulnerability and pushes him toward an identity crisis that would have him doubt himself and the wisdom, mission and love of the Lord who calls him “Beloved”

“IF, IF you are the Son of God,” the tempter taunts, “turn these rocks into bread and eat.” Jesus will not use what God-given resources he has for himself and his own comfort. He has been called to serve others. “IF, IF you are the Son of God,” the tempter continues, “then jump from this steeple in the holiest city of Jerusalem — aren’t you above the laws of nature? Why not start with a big show and have a huge following right off?” Jesus won’t turn away from sharing our humanity. Jesus won’t take the short-cut of sensationalism. He holds fast to his “belovedness.” “Oh, come on Jesus, why make it so tough on yourself. You can have the world ---- wealth, happiness, power, prestige, money..”, the liar says, “if you’ll just worship me.” “Away with you,” is Jesus reply. No matter how he is feeling — hungry or tormented by doubt, weary or alone ---- Jesus chooses to trust in God’s love and to obey. He will be the man and Messiah God wants him to be. He will love and serve those that God loves. He will trust and obey the Lord, no matter the discomfort or problems, believing with his life that “God is good - all the time. All the time — God is good.” This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.

We too have come through the waters of Baptism. We too have been claimed as God’s beloved sons and daughters. We too have been entrusted with the powers of talents and resources for the building of God’s kingdom, for the redeeming of God’s sick world.

We too are tempted by circumstances, fear, rationalizations, "the ways of the world" to choose a way, a word, a manner that belies our belovedness, the persons we are created to be? How many times in our lives, relationships, communities, days do we face the temptation to settle for less of a life than God created us to have?

'Two butterflies - colorful and majestic monarchs - sat side by side on a tree limb. Beside them was the ruptured cocoons from which they'd just emerged.

"Come, fly with me," said the one.

"Caterpillars can't fly," said the other.

"But we're not caterpillars anymore," said the first, flexing his new wings, stretching them their full span till they looked like magnificently crafted stained glass windows.

"Those caterpillar days are gone forever."

"Don't be silly," said the other. "We were born caterpillars and we'll always be caterpillars. That's the way it is."

"Well, then, why did the Maker see fit to give us these wings?" said the one.

The other butterfly thought for a moment and then replied, "I don't know. Some sort of cruel joke, I suppose. He did the same thing to the ostrich, you know."

"Nonsense!" said the first. "Look at all the other butterflies. They're flying. What do you say to that?"

The second butterfly looked out over the meadow and said, "They're not flying. They're just being blown about by the wind. Stupid of them, too. Can't they see it's dangerous? Easy prey for hungry birds and, when they land, mischievous children as well. I'll stick to crawling and climbing, thank you very much. It may be slow, but it's safe and sure."

"It may be slow and safe and sure, but it's ... it's ... well, it's unnatural. Butterflies fly! That's the way the Maker made us. That's our role, our function, our gift: to dance on the wings of the air; to play tag with dandelion seeds; to soar; to dart; to float; to light on a single blade of grass to the delight of all who see; to inspire awe and wonder; to fascinate; to add a note of grace to this world's dreary song."

"Oh, how very poetic of you," said the second. "And also very naive. There's death and danger all about us, every moment. It's all we can do to remain inconspicuous and look unappetizing without having to worry about inspiring and fascinating others."

"Oh, I'm not worried about it at all," said the first. "If only we do what we're created and gifted to do, the inspiration and the fascination will follow."

"I don't know which astounds me more, your ignorance or your innocence," said the second butterfly. "Will you at least admit that there's danger out there?"

"Of course there's danger," said the first. "Greater danger than before: greater gifts bring greater risks. The world hasn't changed since we've become butterflies. We've changed. Or, more precisely, we've been changed."

"Been changed, yes," said the second. "I didn't choose this silly looking angel outfit. I was quite content to live out my days as a caterpillar, feeding on cabbage leaves, staying out of trouble and out of the way, taking care of myself. I don't know why I ever let you talk me into going into that cocoon in the first place. It was dark as death in there. Felt like a tomb."

"I think it was a tomb, of sorts," said the first. "A tomb in which old caterpillars were buried and new butterflies emerged. Butterflies who can fly."

"Caterpillars who can, if they're stupid enough, allow themselves to be blown about by the wind," corrected the second.

The first butterfly again stretched his wings. Grateful for the new gift that had been given him, he could wait no longer to try it out.

"Come fly with me," he implored once again.

"Caterpillars can't fly," maintained his companion.

"Have it your way," said the first as he stepped off the limb and stepped into the air. His flight was instinctive, though not effortless. Its gracefulness not learned, not acquired, not the result of hours of practice, but innate, automatic, the simple exercise of a magnificent and magnanimous gift. If he wanted to be graceless, now that would take some effort.

He soared and darted, floated, paused for a moment to light on a wildflower, and took off again while the air was dead still, to prove to his tree-hugging friend that he was not merely being "blown about by the wind."

His friend had been right about one thing. The children, the dogs, the birds did indeed present a new danger. It had been easy to hide as a caterpillar. Nature provided its own camouflage. But now, as a monarch butterfly, hiding was more difficult and flight not always faster than the predators' leap.

Still and all, he thought, flight is a gift. And as he soared once again, his friend tentatively flexed his wings and seemed to inch closer to the edge of the limb."¹

Through God's transforming presence and power in our baptism, in the bread and wine, God's word and community, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been made God's beloved ----- not caterpillars but God's very own empowered love let loose in our world. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," Jesus says, "Come fly with me." Keep turning and returning to our Lord, who frees us to be the baptized, redeemed sons and daughters of God we are. There will still be dangers, doubts,

wilderness and seductive temptations. But what is possible if we live in our belovedness, believing in the truth of God's goodness, love and victory no matter the circumstances? What is possible? Jesus shows us what is possible — the hungry get fed and the captives are set free... there is healing and restoration, beauty, compassion, newness of life and fearless love set free in the world. Trust and obey, Jesus says, "Come fly with me." What might be possible for each of us and our church if we live in our belovedness, use our God-given wings? I, for one, would love to know. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," Jesus says, "Come fly with me... come fly with me." Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 1/16/15

ENDNOTES

1. From "If the Son Makes You Free," author unknown posted on www.sermons.com