

## Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> July 2020 - *Lessons from a Butterfly*

I met up with my dad last weekend for a socially distanced walk. We had picked a beautiful sunny day and chose a great location walking through Kings Forest in Suffolk. I introduced him to the 'Seek' app which helps to identify insects and flowers. You use the App to take a photo and it will (most of the time) name what natural treasure you have come across.

Catching photos of butterflies proved challenging as they do not sit still for very long but taking photos of caterpillars was much easier! This is a photo I took whilst out on a socially distanced walk with Kay and Mervyn. My Seek app readily informed me it was a Drinker Moth caterpillar.



Watching the butterflies got me thinking about the Christian life and my own Christian journey.

I guess we all know the lifecycle of a butterfly? It starts its journey as a caterpillar. It has only two jobs to do, to eat and to grow. This was a similar start to my journey as a new Christian! Whilst at university I was invited by some Christians on my rugby team to a sports quiz run by Christians in Sport. The Navigators were also involved within my halls or residence. Every Christian gathering I was invited to always included food and it was always free! I was eating and growing!! But I was also being gently introduced to God's word and being invited to church and home groups. I was being spiritually fed and this is how I started to grow and change.

The next phase when a caterpillar has eaten and grown enough it enters into the chrysalis. Here it changes and grows until it emerges a beautiful butterfly... or does it? Actually before it can emerge from its cocoon it must go through an extremely painful experience: 'The bulk of the caterpillar's pudgy mass is recycled into the adult features that are meshing together inside the tough shell of the chrysalis. The interior is, at this stage, mostly a nutrient soup.'<sup>1</sup>

A 'nutrient soup' doesn't sound very appealing! The transformation of a butterfly is far from easy and sometimes the changes we face in life are extremely difficult too. When I made that step to choose to follow God's way and not my own I became a new creation. It was the beginning of a transformation. It is not easy to live differently to the patterns of the world and my own ego but scripture encourage us:

***"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor. 5)***

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Jones, Discover Wildlife

***“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” (Romans 12:2)***

After a long time, the exhausted insect breaks out of its imprisonment. Initially the emerging butterfly’s wings are limp and unusable. It is not until the butterfly has done some work that it can actually use its wings and fly. There is still work to do. We as Christians are like this as well. It is by God’s grace we are saved but the transformation does not stop there. The Holy Spirit comes and works within us to change us from the inside. Like the butterfly, we can emerge from our struggle and exertions if we hang on in there.

The final stage is that the butterfly soars into life as a completely transformed new creation. We need to allow God to work in us, to transform us into the beautiful creation He has planned for each one of us. We need to trust God as our hope for the future.

Our transformation as individuals is important but what about our transformation as a church? How are we growing? A question that I heard recently was: ‘during lockdown what has been lost and what has been gained?’ As the caterpillar changes and grows it loses certain functions and abilities but on the other side of the cocoon what does it gain? The ability to fly and see the world from a different vantage point is one obvious example.

Now is the time to reflect on what we as a church have lost during this time of pandemic. There will be a collective grief and trauma as we emerge. What has had to stop never to be resurrected again? Perhaps at times we have felt a bit like that ‘nutrient soup’?! But as we look ahead and start to gather strength in our wings, what might our new vantage point bring us? What have we gained? A chance to pause, take a breath and reflect. A chance for the gifts of other church members to be realised. A connection with those for whom church attendance hasn’t been a previous feature of life. What else would you add to the list?

Just as the transformation for a butterfly is not easy, sometimes the changes we are required to make as Christians and especially now as a church moving forwards, are not going to be easy. But they are necessary if we are going to be useful to God’s Kingdom.

I pray that we will allow God to grow us, to transform us, and then to use us for His glory. I pray that we will emerge from this pandemic with the full wings of faith and be a source of vivid, yet delicate beauty, displaying God’s glory and love to our community. Amen.

**Activity:**

This week is the start of the Big Butterfly Count which runs between Friday 17<sup>th</sup> July and Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August. It is a UK wide survey aimed at helping assess the health of the environment simply by counting the amount and type of butterflies (and some day flying moths) that you see. You can download the ID chart [here](https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/) or use the app. Full information can be found here: <https://bigbutterflycount.butterfly-conservation.org/> I would encourage you to get involved whether out on your walks or from your own garden or the St Mary’s church yard.

