

"We have never been in bondage to anyone. What do you mean, **'You will be made free'?**" *"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."*

Two butterflies – majestic, colorful monarchs - sat side by side on a tree limb. Beside them was the ruptured cocoon 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 to 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 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.*

It was then that his friend tentatively flexed his wings and seemed to inch closer to the edge of the limb.

Reformation Sunday points out to us that... We have never been in bondage to anyone. That we have "been made FREE." Yes, the Gospel of John says. ***"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."***

OUR FREEDOM IN THIS LIFE COMES FROM JESUS HIMSELF. YET, SO OFTEN WE FIND OURSELVES IN BONDAGE DUE TO THE THINGS OF THIS WORLD.

WHAT ARE HOLDING YOU IN BONDAGE TODAY? Once the Butterflies were set free from their cocoons, one was excited, and one was scared. What cocoons of this world are holding you in Bondage?? STOPPING YOU FROM BEING FREE?

You live in the land of the FREE. So, for most of us FREEDOM IS SOMETHING WE TAKE FOR GRANTED. We get up in the morning, and we go. For some that is a bit more challenging since ICE has been placed in certain cities. Yes, forms of Oppression still exist. But all in all, we can do what we want "with in the law" of our land.

But when Jesus says in our Gospel today, "the Son has made you FREE..." what is he truly saying...

Jesus was talking about something deeper yet, something that challenges our identity as people of God. He was talking about our slavery to sin, our defeat to anything that is less than God and apart from God — and it is a slavery we all fall into. As an example of our SIN comes from a story in the life of a woman named Agnes.

Agnes had a knack for church work. Had she been 25 instead of 72, she would have been a natural for the professional ministry. The Sunday school classes she taught were excellent. Her energies were limitless. She'd served on the church council, had been to Synod Assembly, and currently served on Synod Council Board. **Agnes' church commitment was frequently used as an illustration to other church officers, young adults, and teens as a fine example of Christian charity and commitment.** She was always the first to volunteer for new events in the church or say a corrective word to a noisy child.

Neither the minister nor any of her friends could ever remember having seen Agnes angry. If she didn't like the new inclusive language "Alternate Lifestyles," Agnes didn't pout or get angry. She would merely discuss these unnecessary changes with others, do a little telephoning, and in no time, all things would be back to normal.

You see, Agnes was a good communicator and a good source of information. If something good, bad, or interesting happened to anyone in the community Agnes would know all the details. *She could tell you which recent widower was rumored to be entertaining which recent widow,* or how much Smith's new house had cost, and whether Mr. Jones would soon be going out of business or not.

People were shocked when a new member complained that Agnes Hayes was a gossip. No one would think of criticizing Agnes! And sure enough, not long after this, it was discovered that this new member had had reason to be

concerned. *Did you know that she had recently left a husband who had abused her for years and had come to town to start a new life?* Agnes knew and soon everyone knew.

If Jesus had met Agnes on the street and demanded that she *"repent, turn away from your sins,"* Agnes would have readily agreed to forsake the second lump of sugar in her morning coffee, would acknowledge her tendency to eat too many sweets and that she wasted too much time watching television. Beyond that, Agnes would have a hard time seeing what she could do differently. *With her many years of church service, committee work, and faithful participation she saw herself as a full member of the household of God.*

The hard part for Agnes, and perhaps for most of us, is being able to recognize our own defeat to sin.

YES, WE ALL FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD. After all, we're not cocaine users, child molesters, or streetwalkers. Jesus' words aren't as necessary for us as they are for Agnes or the Pharisees or Osama bin Laden. **But we DO-DO WRONG.**

We are as much enslaved to sin as any of these others; if we are to be FREE, then we must let Jesus tell us the truth about the lies we live, not just the easy-to-spot sins of somebody else. And we must let him tell us the truth about the lies that CURRENTLY EXIST IN OUR LIVES AND THE LIFE OF OUR CHURCH.

"If you continue in my word," Jesus said to those who had been nodding agreement to his teaching, *"you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free"* (John 8:31-32). Continuing in Jesus' word is like continuing in any other relationship: to do it well requires constant effort, not assuming you already know everything you need to know or are already doing everything you need to do.

SO, AS YOU CONTINUE IN THIS LIFE, WILL YOU CHOOSE A COCOON AND HIDE OR WILL YOU CHOOSE "FREEDOM" AND SPREAD YOUR WINGS AND FACE THIS WORLD FOR GOD?

It isn't a matter of doing what we like with our lives - we soon lose the power to do it. We become a slave to our own self-indulgences, prejudices, and selfishness, and they master us. But Jesus can set us free!

The story is told of Diogenes, the Greek philosopher who was captured by pirates and later put up for sale on the slave block. Looking around, Diogenes saw a vacant looking young man, very richly dressed, who stood by. "Sell me to that man," he said. "He looks as if he needs a master." We will indeed all have a master of one kind or another, and the scripture today encourages us to accept Christ for that master.

It was Jesus' point here, that if we sinners we are not free. In fact, we are slaves. The message of our Savior talks of liberation. Paul says in Romans 3... *"All men have sinned and are far away from God's saving presence. But by the free gift of God's grace, they are all put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free."*

The Scripture promises liberation. It is the sense and realization of that which gave the New Testament its atmosphere. **Thus, it is the happiest book in literature.**

A few years ago, when I was in Atlanta, Georgia, I went to see the tomb of the famous Martin Luther King, Jr. I was deeply impressed by the words across the top of that tomb: *"Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, free at last!"* **In their life times, both Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr. found that freedom.**

My friends, we are free from fear, free from self, free from others, and free from sin. **It is Jesus Christ and his discipleship that set us free.**

Jesus said... *"If you obey my teaching, you are really my disciples; you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."*

LET US LEAVE THE COCOONS OF THIS WORLD THAT KEEP US IN BONDAGE TO SIN AND INSTEAD SPREAD OUR WINGS AND SHARE WITH OTHERS THE GLORY OF GOD.

Amen.