

“Breaking Through the Cocoon”

Acts 2:1-21
John 15:26-16:15

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A man found a cocoon of an emperor moth and took it home so he could watch the moth come out of the cocoon. One day a small opening appeared. The man sat and watched the moth for several hours as it struggled to force its body through that little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. To the man it appeared as if the moth had gotten as far as it could in breaking out of the cocoon and was stuck.

Out of kindness the man decided to help the moth. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon so that the moth could get out. Soon the moth emerged, but it had a swollen body and small-shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the moth, expecting that in time the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which also would contract to its proper size.

Neither happened. In fact, that little moth spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It was never able to fly.

The man in his kindness and haste didn't understand that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the moth to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body into the wings so that the moth would be ready for flight.

Jesus is preparing his disciples to leave the cocoon and to begin to fly. He has been teaching them and showing them over the last three years what the Kingdom of God is and he is beginning to reveal who he is. But they're not ready for all of who he is. It would be too much and it might even stunt their growth.

While Jesus was before them in the flesh, they could only see a man. An amazing man. Yes. A man from God. Yes. But a man. They couldn't see past his flesh. That's perhaps why he says to them, "It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you." They were so attached to God in the flesh that they could not receive him in the spirit. It's impossible to conceive of God Almighty as a carpenter.

While Jesus was alive, he served as a cocoon for the disciples. He guarded them and was preparing them to enter into the real world, God's world, eternal truth, the world of the Spirit. Had Jesus tried to unload his full nature upon them before he was crucified, raised, and ascended, it would have been too much. It would be like teaching a student calculus before arithmetic. The student would just give it up in frustration, feeling she could never attain such knowledge. The disciples needed to learn the basic pieces first before they could put it all together. How could they understand resurrection without crucifixion? And how could they understand the crucifixion without his teachings about sacrificial love.

The last step in their basic training was living without Jesus in the flesh. And so he ascended. This was like the hole in the cocoon. There were 50 days between the time of Passover and Pentecost. It is hard to overestimate how difficult a time this must have been for the fledgling apostles. Their minds were still reeling with crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. What's it all mean? They were promised a Helper, an Advocate, a new Teacher. But what would that be like? It's one thing to have a relationship with a man, flesh and blood, but a Spirit?

They needed that 50 days. They needed that time to struggle out of that little hole, their tiny perspective of God and his true reality. They had been living in a cocoon. They had no idea what was really out there. Had they known too soon, it would have been too much. Had they known that most of them would be killed, they probably would have said to Jesus, "No, thank you. I'll stick to fishing."

But through that 50 days, they struggled. They prayed. They began to hunger for God's presence in any way they could receive it. And WHAM! They got it!

Last week preacher and scholar Tom Long said, "It's not that we are moving toward the kingdom- that's progress. It's that the kingdom is moving toward us- that's a collision." WHAM! The disciples weren't left on their own to figure it all out and to systematically build the kingdom of God. The Spirit came to them, ran right into them on Pentecost, destroying their illusions about reality and they came flying out of their cocoons wings aflapping.

Their world went from small and dark, to large and illumined. They were ready to begin to see God's kingdom. Jesus' words and life all of the sudden started to make sense. The pieces came together before their eyes and they began to testify about what they saw. They didn't build it! No. They just shared what they saw, what others could not see. And they began to see what is unseeable without the help of the Spirit: God's power on earth. But even then, they could not see it all. They could not possibly bear God's full and glorious light.

It's like walking out of the dark movie theatre into a sunny day. It takes some time for your eyes to adjust. Imagine walking out of the dark right in front of the Sun. It would blind you. A little at a time. God reveals himself to us a little at a time.

There are two ways we tend to go. We are either impatient with God. We want the Kingdom of God now. Or we get too comfortable in the cocoon. Both ways lead to a small world. Some of us get so frustrated with the way the world is that we wash our hands of it. We want God to fix it all now and in our frustrated impatience for justice, we say, "To hell it with it". We isolate ourselves in our small, little, clean, anti-bacteria world. We raise our noses in a classic holier-than-thou piety, swollen up like the wingless moth. Us and them. We're the righteous and the rest can and will go to hell. God's world is bigger than that.

Or we just while a way the years in our comfortable, safe cocoons. Sure, I know

Jesus. Sure I go to church, but I'm no fanatic. Never wanting more of God. Never wanting to break through the cocoon of safe Christianity into the infinitely broader Kingdom of God. It's a small world and in it our souls will shrivel up and die like the never fully formed wings of the moth.

As the Spirit blows into our life, collides into our world, we began to see who God is more fully. We realize that God is bigger than flesh and blood. We realize that God is bigger than this church. God is bigger than our earthly arguments of politics and religion. God is bigger than any of our struggles on this small little planet.

And our God is not like the man who brought home the cocoon to just observe it impatiently watching and waiting for us to figure it all out. Our God has entered the cocoon with us. This infinite God made himself small that we might know him. But to know him in Spirit we first had to know him in flesh. When we meet Jesus and begin to witness the truth about God's world, we see how unprepared we are for the ultimate and eternal reality that God is preparing for us. God calls us not to struggle against the world, but to struggle with the world. To help prepare this world for flight.

But Christ knew we couldn't do it by ourselves, so he gave us his Spirit. The Spirit both smacks us with the truth, colliding with our daily lives, and at the same time gives us the strength to strive towards God. The Spirit keeps us from getting too comfortable with this world and yet draws us deeper in this world that so needs the presence of God. As we receive the Spirit into our hearts, our lives, we become carries of God in this world. We become light to this dark cocoon of a world. The Spirit neither calls us to remove ourselves from the world nor become just like it. We are called to prepare it.

By the Spirit we are growing wings. We are being prepared for a much bigger world, an everlasting world, one where God is revealed fully, and not only will we be able to bear the weight of God's glory, we will be flying upon it with the wings of the Spirit.

Are we expecting the collision? Are we prepared to fly?