

From Basement Steps to Butterfly Spirit
Acts 2:1-21

Prayer: Mighty God, into your hands we place our lives. Let the power of your Spirit revive our spirits as we are touched by your holy Word and witness this day, to Christ's glory. Amen.

I once attended an exhibition that Sheila was working with at the time, called "Butterflies in Flight". I'd heard on the radio the claim that butterflies have a wonderful way of calming the spirit and soothing the soul.

I must say, there was something wonderful about standing in a screen tent surrounded by hundreds of butterflies, watching them bask their wings in the sun or dance playfully in the air. But with all their beauty, it is easy to forget the traumatic and total transformation they had to endure to become beautiful butterflies. Every butterfly first risks the cocoon as a fuzzy caterpillar where it must undergo a mysterious metamorphosis.

The Greek-speaking world of the early church understood this metamorphosis as a metaphor for the spiritual life. In fact, a Greek

word for life and spirit also meant "butterfly" in very ancient times.

It's easy to see the connection of butterflies to the miracle of Easter, but butterflies have also been used as a symbol for Pentecost, representing new life in the Spirit. Perhaps that's because a believer must risk change, transformation, metamorphosis, in order to embrace new life in the Spirit. Baptism signifies how disciples are empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit to receive new life in Christ. In baptism, we are called to serve and to share as part of a worshipping community where barriers of language or history or tradition are overcome.

The miracle of Pentecost was not so much the speaking in languages, but that this amazing and perplexing pouring out of Spirit was a sign of a metamorphosis. Pentecost is about leaving the cocoon and emerging to spread our wings to the wind of the spirit or bask in the warmth of the Spirit's fire.

St. Luke Church was concerned about their life and vitality, so they took steps to renew their baptism and reclaim God's promise. Soon they began to see what they called lots of movement in their cocoon. So on a Pentecost Sunday they hung a large butterfly mobile to celebrate a rebirth of

excitement and enthusiasm. They invited everyone to come and flap their spiritual wings to start an air current of positive energy. They said, “Come spread your wings and soar with all your family and friends as wonderful new things come to life at our Church.” Pentecost became their time to risk change and to transform; their time to dream new dreams and see new visions.

I’m reminded of a skit by Garrison Keeler on *Prairie Home Companion* where he is playing golf. He hits a terrible shot out of bounds, and watches the ball bounce down someone’s basement stairs. Determined to continue play, Keeler walks down the steps and into the darkness of the basement in search of his ball. In the basement, he sees someone.

“Larry!” he exclaims. “What are you doing here? I thought you had left this basement after 30 years finally, to join the outside world, to enjoy the sunshine, to meet new people?”

Larry simply says, “I like basements better.”

When Keeler finds his ball, he begins to line up his shot. That’s when Larry says, “You’ll never make it. It will ricochet off the rafter and hit you in the throat. You’ll have to go to the hospital. You’ll suffer damage to your voice, and you’ll never play golf again. This shot is going to be the last shot

you’re ever going to take...” But Keeler ignores Larry’s negative energy and hits a beautiful shot up the basement steps. Keeler then returns to the beauty of the golf course to resume his game.

This skit becomes a parable about Pentecost. It shows the contrast between basement steps and butterfly living. Pentecost calls us out of those dark places of dullness and negativity where it seems so many seem content to live, and calls us into fullness and life. As people of Pentecost, we ignore negative voices that would tell us what we cannot do, but persist in our quest to stay on course.

So, in the days ahead, as we move into a new time as a church, we have a choice between basement steps or butterfly life. For me, the choice has already been made. MPC will continue to spread its wings and soar with family and friends as wonderful new things come to life through the love of Christ and the power of His Spirit.