

Thoughts from the Manse 31st July 2020

One of my favourite spiritual symbols is the butterfly, and its life cycle. Years ago, I read the book 'When the heart waits' by Sue Monk Kidd, the story of her own spiritual transformation in which butterflies featured quite heavily. Through that I was introduced to the book 'Hope for the Flowers' by Trina Paulus, which looks at spiritual transformation through the eyes of a caterpillar, and my favourite story for baptisms has been The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle.



Butterflies are often linked to hope and often depicted as being the spirit of a loved one during grief. There is something mesmerising about watching a butterfly gently flit from flower to flower. They almost seem to hover on the flower rather than landing on the flower, their wings rarely still, and ready for flight. It is an incredibly special thing to have a butterfly land on you.

There are many books around at the moment about attracting butterflies into your garden. It is an art, not just about having the correct flowers for the butterfly but also recognising that where there are butterflies there will be caterpillars so having the right combination of plants to protect the ones you hope to eat



yourself from the ravages of hungry caterpillars. I remember when we were living in Gloucestershire, we had a fair collection of self-sown Aquilegia plants in a variety of colours, and though it would be good to collect them together in one spot to create a display. We moved them all, and they thrived, until one morning we found them all eaten by caterpillars. We have also lost vegetables to an attack of caterpillars, and I can understand where Eric Carle got the idea for his lovely book.

I have just started reading Margaret Silf's 'Hidden Wings', a book looking at how the transformative journey from caterpillar to butterfly could help us understand the world we find ourselves in today with all its tumultuous changes which seem to shake the very core of what we believe about God and ourselves. Indeed, she likens entering the chrysalis to where we find ourselves but offers the hope that this could be an opportunity for profound spiritual transformation. Written a couple of years ago, before Covid, it is a book for our time, it is hard not to see Lockdown as a chrysalis and the wisdom contained in the book as something of a guidebook for the future shape of the church, is it time for that transformative shift into a new form?



Teilhard de Chardin believed that humanity's evolution was not just physical but also spiritual, and that we are moving towards the best we can be albeit slowly, through every decision we make. He talks about consciousness as a key step and way before the full advent of quantum theology he was suggesting that humanity was on the cusp of an evolutionary leap into a new consciousness, a collective conscience that would demonstrate our connectiveness in an entirely new way. Science is showing the wisdom of his words as we begin to understand ourselves in a new way. This too, is a part of the spiritual awakening that may be the outcome of our entry into the chrysalis of lockdown.

There is a freedom about the butterfly which for me symbolises what it means to be truly aware of our connections with creation. It is about allowing imagination to be our guide and freeing ourselves from the straitjacket of possessions. We can explore anything in our modern world if we want to.



Be free.
Unless you take wing, you will always be eating cabbages.
Tomorrow is a new day.
Take the chance and contemplate freedom.
Emerge from the chrysalis of transformation
Remember your dreams
Fly with the wind and explore the flowers
You are unique and special, live life to the full.