

*“Tombs and Cocoons”*

Sister Betty Lou Knox said,

**“The metamorphosis of the caterpillar into a butterfly  
is a symbol of resurrection.”**

“During the process of transformation, the chrysalis experiences darkness and constriction inside the cocoon.

A struggle through a tiny opening forces fluid from the body of the butterfly  
so that it will be free to fly at the right moment,  
ready to enter a new phase of its life ...”

**“We, too, are like a chrysalis waiting in endless darkness.  
Easter is about hope that is willing to wait in the darkness  
while it trusts in transformation.”**

That was expressed by Joyce Rupp in an excerpt of her poem,  
The Easter Challenge, which says:

“Every year cocoons give us their treasures,”

**“And every year the dull and dead in us meets our Easter challenge:  
to be open to the unexpected,  
to believe beyond our security,  
to welcome God in every form,  
And trust in our own greening.”**

(Sister Betty Lou Knox from *Out of the Ordinary*, by Joyce Rupp © 2000)

On this Easter, as we begin our new **“Emerge” Worship Series**, we are reminded that sometimes, creation itself tells of God’s Glory and of the Resurrection promise! Nature offers a perfect symbol for the journey through hardship and loss, sorrow, death, and New Life and joy.

**The butterfly has long been a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus as well as the resurrection of believers as we emerge from the power of death.** Like caterpillars, it might be hard for us to imagine the New Life that is in store for us, and we find safety and security in the enclosing darkness of our own cocoons.

A symbol of spring, the butterfly truly reflects the beauty of nature. The butterfly emerging from its cocoon represents the resurrection of Christ from the tomb. **Just as the butterfly comes forth with a new body, those who trust in Christ come forth with a new and transformed life.** The butterfly also represents flight, freedom, and creative thinking.

**In this Easter season, we will examine our own transformations from cocoons and tombs to the unfurled beauty of all God calls us to be.** In this message today, we are going to consider how our Easter Scripture informs our understanding of the **Process of Emerging, which is a journey through hardship, loss, sorrow, death, New Life, and joy.** As we examine this subject and the Reading, there are some basic questions we need to consider.

They are:

**How did Jesus experience that journey?**

**How did his disciples experience the journey, especially Mary, Peter, and the “beloved” disciple?**

**How are we experiencing the journey?**

Answering the question, **“How did Jesus experience that journey?”**, we need to remember how Jesus came to be buried in the tomb. He was betrayed and unjustly arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, abandoned, mistreated, interrogated by the High Priests, by King Herod, by the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, tortured, crucified, and killed on the Passover. Jesus did not deserve all of that hardship of loss, sorrow, death, and suffering. **Why did he go through it? It was because his ultimate purpose was to reveal God’s Agape – Suffering and Self-Giving Love for All of Humanity and Creation. Further, he came to tell people the Truth about our Divine Parent’s Invitation and Welcome of All People into a New Relationship with our God.** He did that because our Creator has already forgiven us and wants everyone to be truly happy in the New Life of God’s Kingdom – in being New

Creatures in Christ! All that brought Jesus to be in the borrowed Tomb where they placed him following his death on the cross.

The final part of Jesus' journey through the Process of Emerging – of his being transformed is where our Reading from the Gospel of John picked up the story line. We are not given any details about Jesus' actual experience of being raised from the dead. However, we can make a few inferences from the Scripture's report.

Those inferences bring us to the second question of **“How did his disciples experience the journey, especially Mary, Peter, and the ‘beloved’ disciple?”** Transitioning to our answer to that question it is helpful to recognize Jesus' body had not been not stolen from the tomb, because someone, who would do that, would not have unwrapped him from his burial cloths in the tomb. Instead, when Jesus was alive again, he took off the burial wrappings around his head, rolled them up and placed them in a separate location from all of the other wrappings, which he had also removed from around his body. **I suspect that was why the Disciple whom Jesus loved after beating Peter to the open tomb was said to have seen and believed. John explained in verses 6b-7, “He saw the linen cloths lying there and the cloth which had been around Jesus' head. It was not lying with the linen cloths but was rolled up by itself.”**

The Process of Emerging for Peter, the Beloved Disciple, and Mary Magdalene was closely related to Jesus' experience. They had all suffered greatly because of the hardships, pain, betrayal, abandonment, torture, false trials, and death on the cross, which Jesus had experienced. That was the case because of their great admiration and love for him led them to have sorrow and grief as he went through all his difficulties and death. **Although Jesus had been the one buried in the Tomb, they were in their own tombs or cocoons of grief, sadness, and sorrow. Remember, they were huddled and hiding behind locked doors!** Obviously, for a period of time after Jesus was no longer a prisoner to the Tomb – after he had emerged to New Life, **the disciples, including Mary, were still in their cocoons of despair and grief** for finding the tomb empty did not end the possibility Jesus' body might have been stolen. Indeed, Mary had not noted the treatment of the grave cloths and she was under the impression someone had moved his body. She told the angels in **verse 13b, “They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!”**

At this point, let's also keep in mind our third question, **“How are we experiencing the journey?”** Yes, how are we experiencing the journey – the process for our emerging from brokenness and bondage to death? What I am suggesting on this Easter is that **we have much in common with the experience of Mary Magdalene.** Like Mary, people through the intervening years have also been in a tomb or cocoon of suffering, pain, and grief. Even for those of us, who have consciously come to understand ourselves to be followers of Jesus Christ, there are many times, when we are tempted to pull back into our caves of depression, meaninglessness, and sadness.

**What enabled Mary to burst out of the tomb – cocoon was not the mere fact that Jesus' Tomb was empty but what happened next in our Scripture.** Mary Magdalene had the beginning of the opening of her tomb – the crack in her cocoon as the Risen Jesus engaged her in conversation, although, at first, she did not recognize him. **Verse 15 reported, “Woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. ‘Who is it that you are looking for?’** She asked the mystery man to give Jesus to her, if he had taken him. Her tomb door opened wide – her cocoon finally cracked wide to let her out when Jesus responded in **verse 6a, “Mary!”** How has Jesus opened wide your tomb or cocoon by calling you by name? One good and truthful answer is – when we manifest God's Agape Love toward one another – especially toward someone in need of support and encouragement, then the Risen Christ is both among us and calling each of us by name! **We join in the experience of hearing Jesus call us by name as we become aware of our call to be transformed from the world's ways of selfishness to the Kingdom of God's New Life in Christ and, then, follow Jesus' example!** Like Mary, we have reason for Joy because we know Jesus Christ is Risen, he has been victorious over the powers of Death and Evil, we partially share in his Promised New Kingdom in the present, and in the future, we will join with him and All of God's Children in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God!

**Let's Rejoice in the Good News of God's Agape Love for us and for All People as demonstrated in the Resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ! As Jesus was raised to Life from the Tomb, let us also emerge from the tomb and cocoons of life to the New Life in Christ! Amen.**