

*“Unfold: Claiming New Possibilities”*

During this **“Emerge”** Worship Celebration Series, we have been using the metaphor of how a caterpillar goes through the **process of Metamorphosis to become a butterfly** as a way of discussing how we go through the process of Transformation into the people God intends us to be. Today, we are focusing on the part of the process, which is paralleled by the butterfly exiting its chrysalis. This part of the process has been described in the following way: “Now that the **butterfly has slipped free from the chrysalis**, it’s just beginning to **unfold into its new form** ... after slipping free from the chrysalis, its wings are soft and malleable, its abdomen is distended, full of the fluid that belongs in the wings, and begins the process of pumping it out to the wingtips, which expands and stretches them out to their full potential. In just a short time, the **wings are now fully expanded**, but they are very soft and vulnerable. They’re not yet ready to be used for flight... they’re still adjusting to being out of the enclosure of the chrysalis. If the butterfly tried to spread them they would just bend downwards or flop over. The butterfly needs to hang down vertically so its wings can take shape and firm up, before it’s ready for flight.

This space between the chrysalis and flying might seem like lost time ... like nothing is going on. It’s the space between two more ‘important’ phases, metamorphosis and flight! But even though we can’t see anything happening, the butterfly looks like it’s just hanging out, waiting, or maybe unsure of what to do next ... we almost want to be cheerleaders, going ‘Come on! You can do it!’ But this space between is more important that we give it credit for ... for butterflies and for us as well.

There’s even a name for this space between things ... **LIMINAL SPACE**, it deals with times of transition, with threshold moments, and boundaries.”

“... We have a really hard time simply resting in this space – and that’s **what the butterfly does as it comes out of the cocoon** ... it comes out and **extends its wings, stretching them out, but it is not yet ready to fly**. It must simply hang there until the wings have fully dried and are ready to be used. Interestingly, if a butterfly were to begin flying right away after it emerges from the cocoon, it would hurt its wings PERMANENTLY! Without allowing the wings time to dry in their full form, they would collapse in on themselves upon use ... not having the strength and qualities needed for flight, they would bend and break, and then harden that way as they dry.”

After sharing that description of the butterfly’s experience and relating it to our own Transformation, Rev. Jessica B. Naulty asked, **“Where are you right now? What liminal space do you find yourself in? What are the new possibilities that God is inviting you to dream about and, when you’re ready, claim for yourself?”** (April 30th, 2017: Unfold: Claiming New Possibilities by Rev. Jessica B. Naulty)

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Adele Schmidt of Trinity UCC in Manchester, Maryland has said, **“We never know the possibilities that God has in mind for us. We need to claim that God is for us! We need to claim that we like Zechariah and the butterfly are willing to live in an awkward place until God’s possibilities emerge in ways we never imagined.”**

Dr. Schmidt provided an example of “God’s possibilities” emerging. She wrote, “Each month I meet with a spiritual director, **Sister Eileen Quinn at the Aisling Retreat House** in Millers. Last week before TUCC’s vote to repair the sanctuary, when Sister Eileen and I met we talked about the money it would take to complete the restoration and the fear spending that amount of money created in the congregation.

Sister Eileen said. **‘This is a time for trusting God. You never know what God might have in mind.’** Then she told me this remarkable story about the retreat house.

The retreat house was located on fairly good sized piece of land but the sisters were concerned that eventually the piece which the order did not own would be sold for development. This would impact the goal of the retreat house to remain a quiet place set-apart from the noise of the world.”

**“The sisters had an opportunity to buy the adjacent piece of land for \$86K.”** “They had to respond quickly and there was no way that they could come up with that kind of money in a short period of time. So, they began to pray hard. One of the sisters called her brother to see about his willingness to get a second mortgage on his home. They promised that the order would pay him back. Unbeknownst to them, while this phone conversation was going on,

one of Sister Eileen's spiritual directee clients had come into the chapel to pray. The door to the chapel was open (which is it never is).

An hour later, Sister Eileen met with the spiritual directee and at the end of the session, the directee said, 'I could not help but overhear the conversation about needing \$86K to secure the additional land.'" **"I value what you are doing here and the quiet that this place provides. I am giving you the \$86K."** (Unfold: Claiming New Possibilities by Suzanne Adele Schmidt, Ph.D., M.Div. of Trinity UCC, Manchester, MD)

Armed with the description of the **Liminal Space part of the Process for the Butterfly and our own Transformation** and with the **example of God providing the New Possibility to the "Retreat House"**, let's **consider how Zechariah and Elizabeth** provide us a good example of how we need to put our trust in **God's Promises – the New Possibilities for each of us – how we need to claim the New Possibilities God is providing us in our own Transformation Process.**

God revealed a New Possibility to Zechariah and Elizabeth through the angel Gabriel's visit with him. Our Reading reported in verses 12-14, ***"When Zechariah saw him, he was alarmed and felt afraid. But the angel said to him, 'Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son. You are to name him John. How glad and happy you will be, and how happy many others will be when he is born!"*** Fear and reverence are always present when one experiences the presence of God or a special representative of God, such as an angel, the Risen Christ or the Holy Spirit. So, we have no reason to be surprised by our awe and apprehension – no reason to feel ashamed when God breaks into our lives with a New Possibility! **Further, our Divine Parent always wants us to be comforted and our fear quelled, when we experience those astonishing moments of God's Presence and Gifts – New Possibilities.** The Promises of God about the Divine's Presence and Faithfulness enable all of us to move ahead without fear and with Hope!

The angel went on to provide more Good News about the meaning and purpose of this New Possibility for Zechariah and Elizabeth in verses 15-17, ***"John will be great in the Lord's sight. ... From his very birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and he will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord, strong and mighty like the prophet Elijah. He will bring fathers and children together again; he will turn disobedient people back to the way of thinking of the righteous; he will get the Lord's people ready for him."*** That Promise of God was not just an Important Possibility for Zechariah and Elizabeth but for all the Jews and for all people! What is the content of the New Possibility God has Gifted or Promises to Gift you? How can that New Possibility or Gift be Good News for others beyond yourself?

The Reading reported the joy Elizabeth had as she unwrapped the New Possibility of the coming Birth of her son – her Miracle Baby in verses 24-25, ***"Some time later his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and did not leave the house for five months. 'Now at last the Lord has helped me,' she said. 'He has taken away my public disgrace!"*** When everyone learn the Good News of the New Possibility God was doing for and through Elizabeth and Zechariah, they joined in their joy, as stated in verses 57-58, ***"The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard how wonderfully good the Lord had been to her, and they all rejoiced with her."*** We all rejoice together when one or more of us is blessed by a New Possibility from God, especially when we share our Gifts of God's Spirit!

Next in the Scripture, the friends and relatives attempted to manage this New Possibility from God – to express their personal desires for control by deciding what name should be given to the Miracle Baby. Fortunately, both Elizabeth and Zechariah unwrapped – faithfully claimed the New Possibility by following the Will of God for the Reading announced in verses 60 and 63-64, ***"But his mother said, 'No! His name is to be John.' ... Zechariah asked for a writing pad and wrote, 'His name is John.' How surprised they all were! At that moment Zechariah was able to speak again, and he started praising God."***

During the remainder of this "Emerge" Worship Celebration Series, which concludes on Pentecost Sunday, June 9th, is a **LIMINAL SPACE or TIME** for each of us to discern the New Possibilities God is Gifting us, to unwrap and claim those New Possibilities, and then, to both commit ourselves to fulfilling God's Purpose for those Gifts and, actually, get about the living out the New Possibilities. **Prayerfully consider the New Possibilities God is putting before you and be about Claiming them for God's Grace and Love, especially through this congregation, Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ. Amen.**