

John 20:19-31

We may think that Easter is now in the past, a week behind us. But not so. We never really leave Easter. We will sing Easter hymns both today and next Sunday, and maybe even after that. We greet each other with “Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!” throughout the Easter season. And our Gospel readings for both today and next Sunday place us right back where we were last Sunday - on the day, the evening of our Lord’s resurrection.

It is as impossible for us to leave Easter as it is for a butterfly to crawl back into its chrysalis from which it emerged. With Easter comes new life--a life lived in Christ that never ends. With Easter comes joy, and peace, and hope.

Yet, in spite of this, we see Jesus’ disciples on Easter evening crawling back into their old cocoon. Actually, the cocoon gives rise to a moth, a chrysalis to a butterfly. They do not fly around their community showing forth the beauty of Jesus’ resurrection. They crawl behind locked doors and sit there in fear. What kind of butterfly does that!

But perhaps we are tempted to crawl back in there with them. Since Easter a week ago, we have seen storms, hail, and flooding. Another round of sickness has made its mark. The same problems in your life, and mine, did not magically vanish with the arrival of Easter Sunday. Instead, new problems--some even more severe than the old ones--have risen to the surface. Did Easter really change anything? Looking at Jesus’ disciples behind locked doors, we would have to say, “No.” And looking at our own lives, we are tempted to give the same answer.

But before we do, look again at our Gospel reading in John 20. The disciples did somehow manage to crawl back into their old chrysalis. But into this old, hardened shell appears the Risen Lord Jesus. What should He say? What should He do? Scold them? Shame them? Get out a stick and start smacking them on their behinds for acting like such wimpy butterflies? Not at all! He says, “*Peace be with you,*” and He shows them the marks of the nails and the spear in His hands and side. And then He does something else: He breathes on them, giving them the Holy Spirit.

I hate to have to tell you this, but it’s true...Easter is not enough. We also need Pentecost. Without the Holy Spirit at work within us, we will crawl back into the old chrysalis with those fearful disciples and live as though Jesus was more dead than alive.

When He breathed out the Holy Spirit on them, the disciples showed signs of life. Their little butterfly wings began to flutter. “*We have seen the Lord!*” they told Thomas. They were out of their hard cocoon actually sounding like disciples of Jesus, and not a dead Jesus, a risen Jesus.

But eight days later their butterfly wings droop, and back into their old, hardened chrysalis they crawl. They, again, hide in fear behind locked doors. So what does Jesus do? Again He comes to them, and again He blessed them with His Spirit. He gives them the word of peace, and by the power of the Holy Spirit turns doubting Thomas into a believer.

Eight days is all it took. Within eight days the disciples went from flying like butterflies to crawling like caterpillars, from peace to fear, from joy to hiding again behind locked doors. How

long does it take us? Do you need the Holy Spirit weekly, even daily? Or can you stay away from where the Risen Lord breathes out His Spirit upon us for days, weeks, even months at a time? This is not a challenge. It's, first, a question of the Law of God to expose Satan's lie which we so easily believe--namely, that we don't need the Holy Spirit to live the risen life in Christ. And secondly, it's an invitation from the Lord to gather, not behind locked doors, but within the doors of His sanctuary, where He comes to us in Word and in Sacrament to give us the same peace and the same Spirit He gave His frightened disciples.

All of us are breathing in here today. But there is One who is breathing unlike any of us. Jesus is here breathing out upon you. He is here to exhale; we are here to inhale. Jesus breathed out the Holy Spirit on His disciples for the purpose of bestowing forgiveness, peace, and life on sinners like us. Every day, we who became butterflies in our baptism, crawl back into the tomb of the old chrysalis. We hide in fear. We snap at our spouse and our children. We disobey our parents. We live everything but the risen life in Christ.

But every day through the reading of Scripture, and every week here in church through hearing and through the Sacrament, the Risen Lord comes to breathe the Holy Spirit on us. He doesn't come to shame us or to punish us, even though we deserve it. He left the shame and punishment on His cross. When Jesus left the hard chrysalis of His tomb, He left your sins there. He left your guilt and condemnation there.

So why do we want to crawl back in there? That's not the risen life. Jesus has freed you from the old chrysalis. You are butterflies now. You are free of your sins. God forgives you in Christ. There is no need to live in fear--fear of God, fear of death, fear of others. You are a butterfly freed from the old hardened shell of your sins, made beautiful in the waters of baptism.

It took a while for Jesus' disciples. It took until Pentecost (when God gave the Holy Spirit in full measure) for them to live with Easter joy and peace; for them to be the butterflies God intended them to be. Let's put away the old hardened chrysalis. We live in the days after Pentecost. God's Holy Spirit is here for you through Christ who breathes upon you whenever you gather here around Him. God did not turn you into butterflies in your baptism so you would crawl like caterpillars back into the old shell of your sinful ways. That's not why He raised Jesus from the dead. That's not why He gives you His Holy Spirit. Jesus stretched out His arms on a cross for you so that you are now free to stretch out your wings and fly like butterflies...free of guilt, free of condemnation, free from the power of sin.

Let those out in the world do the crawling. You are the baptized. You have died and risen with Christ. You are butterflies. You are free to fly now, living the risen life in Christ. You are able to carry to all the doubting Thomas' out there the glorious message of Easter. You are free, and able, to say to all: "Christ is risen!" ("He is risen indeed! Alleluia!") Amen.