

"New Life"

JOHN 20 1:18, YEAR A EASTER

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Cecil B. DeMille, a renowned playwright and producer of epic films such as the Ten Commandments, was asked to write a play about immortality. He went to his cottage in the Maine woods and began to think about the subject. One day he was fishing out in the middle of the lagoon when he noticed that hundreds of water beetles were climbing out of the water, and climbing up the reeds which surrounded his boat.

He continued to sit in his boat meditating and thinking about immortality when he noticed something peculiar was taking place. The beetles were actually changing form before his very eyes. They were breaking themselves open, and out of the discarded shells emerged beautiful dragon flies. He could hardly believe his eyes, but he could not deny the strange phenomenon. At the end of the day there were hundreds of empty shells on the reeds. The delicate, exquisite dragonflies had escaped their limiting prisons to soar up into the clear blue sky. It is said that this event was the inspiration for his play, "The Return of Peter Grimm."

God's love transforms us. Through God's love we are assured that someday we will cast off these old shells and be transformed into something new. However, we don't need to wait until we die to be transformed—to change from beetles to dragonflies or caterpillars to butterflies. Meaningfilled, faithful lives are about transformation and change, about growth and new life.

A starting place is to trust in God's love for each of us and for each other. The Christ Spirit lives in each of us—that Spirit that was in Jesus---that Spirit of God –this is the resurrection---- that the Spirit of Christ continues on in those willing to acknowledge it's presence in ourselves and in each other. It doesn't mean we are God, it means that the living Spirit of Christ lives on through us. If we treated each other as if we really believed that that was true---that the Spirit of God—whatever God is called---- lived in each of us the world would be a far different place.

In order for that to happen we need to be willing to change. But this change doesn't take place in only one way. For some it is a once-in-a-life time event. For others it is a life-long journey of new ah-has ---new explorations, new understandings, new awarenesses of the presence of God. For some it is mainly about feelings and for others it is very logical, intellectual, well thought out about beliefs and ways to live. It doesn't matter what way we take as long as it is one that draws us ever more aware of the presence of God,----as long as we grow in our trust of God's leading--- as long as we are transformed into people who through the very way we live our lives others know about the God of love and justice and mercy and compassion and forgiveness and new life. It doesn't matter what way we take as long as it doesn't hurt others around us, as long as it is life giving, life respecting, life honoring of others.

I am speaking of the ideal, fully aware that none of us are perfect. No one is expected to be perfect to always get things right. We are called to try, to do our best, to choose God's way to the best of our ability. And when we separate ourselves from God or from each other—when we hurt God or when we hurt each other---God is always ready—wanting to be reconciled with us and will show us how to be reconciled with others. No matter how bad our mistakes are God always has a plan B. No matter what horrible things happen in our lives, whether they come about because of something we do, others do, or an accident, or heredity God, out of God's deep, incomprehensible love, always has a plan B and it is always the best possible that can happen.

Why is any of this important---why does it matter that the Spirit of Christ lives through us, or that we grow in our faith, or that we trust in God's love for us, or that we are changed---transformed? Because God needs us.

God is creating a new heaven and God is creating a new earth--- a new Jerusalem. Always has been, always will be. Not just a new Jerusalem, but Isaiah says "I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people. . ." Delight in my people. Powerful and hopeful words to hear as we see, read and hear about death, violence and horror in Jerusalem. But hear the words of God as they tell us what won't happen in this new creation. "They shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and another eat; . . . They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity." How many mothers and fathers grieve the loss of their children born into and for calamity. How painful it is for them and not just in Jerusalem, but throughout God's creation. There is hope. This beautiful and hopeful scripture tells us what will be in this new creation of heaven and earth---this new Jerusalem, ". . . no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a life time. they shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain." They---we shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.

Jerusalem, a new Jerusalem a place three of the world's religions consider holy. Three religions sharing common ancestors, similar beliefs, and histories. Three religions struggling to get along.

Yet, if we trust in God, we know that God knows how to create this new Jerusalem---in Israel as well as a new heaven and earth throughout all of God's creation. God needs us to help bring it about---right here in Alexandria, right in our families, our place of work, at school wherever we are. That's why the transformation is important, that's why we must grow closer to God, that's why we need to be in relationship with God and to trust God. That's what Jesus showed us---how to be faithful to God's way, how to live with the Spirit of Christ in us, how to be a part of God's creation of a new heaven and earth.

May we not hurt or destroy on all God's holy mountain. May we let the Spirit of Christ live within us and through us. May we let God work through us so we can do our part to create this new heaven and earth---a world where there is justice and peace, love and compassion, mercy and forgiveness shared by all people. That my friends is the resurrection.