

A Butterfly Named Thomas
Pastor John Hicks
First United Methodist Church

The good news is that Christ is alive. The bad news is how little impact that event is having in the world today. Let us change that!

For years, I have raised butterflies from caterpillars for kids to release on Easter Sunday morning. This year, every caterpillar but one went into chrysalis and came out a butterfly. Sometimes caterpillars die for no apparent reason and don't reach the promise of their created destiny. So do we and our loved ones.

Ever the optimist, I left the one alone. The other caterpillars grew, spun their cocoons, and eventually emerged as butterflies to celebrate the day of resurrection. The one showed only a little sign of growing. I decided to name him Thomas in honor of the Apostle Thomas, Patron Saint of Different Timing. Thomas the butterfly had the same birthing conditions as his brothers and sisters. He had the same food and same growing environment. Yet his timing was off. Others grew and matured into the butterflies they were meant to be. Thomas' timing was different from the norm. The others experienced the joy of the resurrection on Easter. Thomas finally went into chrysalis and will probably be experiencing his resurrection about the time this article goes into print.

This gives me hope in my life. Like Thomas the butterfly, my timing doesn't always correspond with everybody else's. But also like Thomas the butterfly, the promise of the resurrection experience is still there for me even in the midst of this!

Different timing resulted in the Apostle Thomas missing a resurrection appearance by Jesus, and his being forever labeled "Doubting Thomas", a name synonymous with skepticism. I think Thomas got a bad rap. All of us doubt at one time or another. Some of us doubt every week. There are very few people whose lives are not improved when they move from a life of doubt to a life of faith.

It has been pointed out that an event, no matter how earth-shaking, doesn't have the power to change people's lives. In order for an event to affect a person, it must become an experience. Jesus' resurrection from the dead was an event, but it wasn't real to the disciples until they personally experienced the resurrected Christ in their lives.

Thomas knew of the event of Jesus' resurrection, but it wasn't until he experienced the risen Christ that his life changed. In a like manner, some of us know of the event of Christ's resurrection, but we lack a recent life-changing experience or encounter with Jesus. The story of Easter morning will always be at the heart of the Christian faith because it proclaims that God has conquered death through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Note, however, that the mission of the apostles begins not with knowledge of an empty tomb, but with a personal encounter with the risen Christ. The same is true for us.