

Caterpillar steps and butterfly flight

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Easter is coming early this year. That means all of the preparations that go along with Easter have to be planned earlier. The Clewiston Community Easter Sunrise Service at 6:00 a.m. at Community Presbyterian Church, our church Easter Egg grab and Resurrection Party at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, March 22; the Maundy Thursday Seder Meal and more have found their way to my calendar and planning sessions.

And then there are the butterflies! Each year before Easter, we order over a hundred caterpillars to raise into butterflies so they can be released by children and families at our flower cross on Easter Sunday morning.

They arrived last week, and as I spent the evening using a small paint brush to transfer caterpillars to their individual feeding containers, oddly enough, my thoughts turned to caterpillars. Over the years I have learned more and more about them as I raised them for release. It is amazing to watch a caterpillar spin a chrysalis. It is even more amazing to watch a butterfly emerge from its cocoon! Butterflies symbolize new life, which make them an excellent illustration for Easter. Their emergence from their cocoons is symbolic of Jesus' emergence from the tomb. But butterflies teach us other important life lessons as well.

The butterflies we get help the environment by pollinating plants and do not lay eggs on crop producing plants. It's good to bless the environment we live in and not cause it harm. Generally, the caterpillars spend 7-10 days eating before they spin their cocoon. They spend 7-10 days in their cocoon before emerging as butterflies. Some spend a longer time eating, and some spend a longer time evolving before emerging – a lot like us! Their environment can speed up or slow down the overall process of being what God intended them to be. Again, a lot like us! To get butterflies ready to fly for Easter release calls for advance planning, timely effort, and prayer. That would be a good formula for all of us and for every project we want to complete!

And then there is the life lesson of struggle and perseverance. A man found a cocoon of a butterfly and took it home. One day a small opening appeared, and the man sat and watched the butterfly for a long time as it struggled to force its body through the little hole. Then the butterfly seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared as if it had gotten as far as it could, and it could go no further.

So the man decided to help it out. He took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of the cocoon. The butterfly emerged easily. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would enlarge and expand to be able to support the body, which would contract in time.

Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It never was able to fly.

What the man, in his kindness and haste did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required for the butterfly to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved its freedom from the cocoon.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives in order to be strong enough to fly.