

Saying Goodbye Part 3: Imago Dei Luke 24:44-53

Moving from a caterpillar to a butterfly is hard work. It means total transformation, including change of heart, mind, soul, and life. The excitement of being a butterfly is that it can do so much more than a caterpillar. The life of a caterpillar is to eat as much food as possible; while the butterfly can soar through the air seeing the beauty of God's world and pollinate God's plants. Which would you rather be, a butterfly or a caterpillar? I think I would rather be a butterfly so I can explore God's world and pollinate the spirit of others with God's amazing love. However, as we have learned from Trina Paulus, in order to become a butterfly, I must want it so much that I am willing to give up being a caterpillar. It means transforming into a new image. In the Spiritual world, this new image can be defined as the imago dei (image of God).

The image of God is the transformation that happens as Christians move from "knowing God is love" to becoming the "love of God" for others. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Disciples were the first to live through this transformation. Like most of us, the Disciples who walked and talked with Jesus witnessed God's love at work through Jesus' life. Everything Jesus did was out of love for God's people. They watched Jesus as he talked with the crowds, healed the sick, cast out the demons,

etc. The key here is “they WATCHED” as JESUS WORKED. Now that Christ is preparing for his ascent into heaven, the Disciples have realized that what they saw wasn’t a normal human but the image of God alive in the world. Now it is their turn to take on the image of God. Instead of watching someone else share God’s love, the time has arrived for them to BECOME God’s love for others. Another image, is preparing to pollinate God’s world; but this doesn’t happen overnight. Becoming the image of God, also, takes practice.

As we compare our Spiritual journey with the butterfly, we discover that when the butterfly leaves the cocoon, it doesn’t immediately take flight. A butterfly first pumps blood into its wings to give it strength, this is vital for the transformation. Secondly, it begins to flap its wings helping them dry (or harden) so it can fly. While it looks like a butterfly it hasn’t taken on the full image of a butterfly until it takes and sustains its first confident flight. In the Spiritual transformation of moving from **knowing** God's love into **being** God’s love, Christians can look like Christians but they haven’t fully developed. New Christians need the blood of Christ pumped into their hearts, minds, and souls to bring a new understanding of God to their lives so that it comes "naturally" to us. This blood of Christ means we say goodbye to only seeing God’s love and saying hello to being God’s love for

the world. This change of heart, mind, and soul is becoming the image of God for the world.

According to Luke, before Jesus ascends to heaven, he gives the Disciples their purpose as the new image of God. He teaches them that being God's love is expressed through preaching to others the need to change their hearts, ask for forgiveness, and pollinate the world by opening the door for transforming lives. Being God's love was Jesus' earthly mission. He opened eyes to understanding how loving God and being God's love for one's neighbor is the true life of a Christian. Now, the Disciples are preparing themselves to take flight as the delivers of God's love. This truly is a different role. It takes practice of offer God's love to another person.

I believe there is a misconception of what it means to be Christian in the image of God. I would define it as more than knowing God loves me, but also as maturing into a Spiritual adult in the eyes of God. A Spiritually mature Christian is capable of doing more than a new Christians. Like an adult butterfly, called imago, is capable of flying, pollinating, mating, and creating a new generation of butterflies, an adult Christian is one who has matured to live in the image of God. A mature adult has learned the skills of Discipleship and can lead others to the path of eternal life with God. For

these men and women, it is more than saying, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the bible tells me so.” Being a mature Christian is helping others experience God’s eternal love and teaching them how that love has sustained Christians since the beginning of creation. The Disciples have watched Jesus for years. Now, they are ready to let go of being the follower and join Jesus as a leader of others.

I believe you are both leaders and followers who bring the image of God alive in the world today. However, there are more followers than active leaders. I use the words “active leaders” as a way of describing those who are willing to step out as teachers, preachers, committee chairs, treasurers, committee members, etc. It takes strength and practice to step into positions that reflect the image of God for the world. This role requires knowledge, understanding, and courage to say goodbye to old self and hello to the new adult Christian. It’s a bit scary to fly for the first time as a representative of God. For an adult Christian to flap its wings and leave the world of what is familiar and comfortable takes trust and practice. What this new Christian will soon discover is that there is so much more to see, understand, and share once they have learned to fly.

In the next few weeks, you have the opportunity to fly as the NEW Denison First United Methodist Church. In the past twelve years, you have

experienced what it is like to receive God's love. You have fed your ravenous hunger with bible study, sermons/worship, prayer, etc. You have even tested your wings as new born souls through building a new deck with a ramp for Bill Kruse, Imagine No Malaria mission project, creating the "God's hands" Puppet Ministry, and so much more. Together, we have explored God, tested our own Spirits, and grown stronger in our faith and confidence in God. Now, the time has arrived for you to step into your image of God and become the next Spiritual leader in this church. It's time to say goodbye to whom the church has been and say hello to the church God is calling you to be today. There are new Christians waiting to be born into the image of God. Do you want to be the caterpillar or the butterfly? There's still time to practice before you go solo. Amen.