

The Day of Resurrection - Easter Day. April 16, 2017. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland
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Butterflies, Bunnies, and Frogs! (Oh My!) No - this isn't entomology or zoology or herpetology 101! It's Easter Day – and Butterflies, Bunnies, and Frogs all connected (but you might have guessed that).

Do you know that every year the river Nile floods? This has been true from time immemorial, of course. And as the flood waters have receded each year the frogs that had vanished over the winter reappear in large numbers – so large that if you go to the banks of the river the sound is deafening! For much of Egyptian history, for that reason, frogs have been symbols of fertility. And for the early Egyptian Christians, the disappearance of frogs in the dark times, and their reappearance in the season of rebirth reminded them of two things: first, because they reappeared out of the new waters they were lively symbols for baptism's rebirth. And, secondly, they shouted “death and resurrection.” When you have powerful symbols they find their way onto lots of things: before the 6th century, lamps appeared among Egyptian Christians with images of frogs on them. Some of these frogs had the cross crafted into their backs and others were inscribed with the words "I am the Resurrection" (John 11:25).

You know where we're going now, don't you?! In Europe, rabbits were the symbols for fertility – which is why there's that connection between bunnies and eggs! Some “misguided” people believe that the original connection between rabbits – hares – and Easter was made by German Lutherans. They had a legendary story where the “Easter Hare” originally played the role of a judge, evaluating whether children were good or disobedient at the start of the season of Eastertide. Of course we all know the truth: that role's played by Santa Claus!

Actually, in the early Celtic Church (so a thousand years before the “johnny-come-lately” Lutherans) rabbits were most associated with St. Brigid of Kildare, this time as symbols not only of fertility. After a winter's absence rabbits came up out of a hole – a “tomb” – in the ground, and so it was an easy connection with the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection.

And then there's butterflies! More, even than frogs and rabbits, the butterfly is a symbol of resurrection because of its' transformation from a caterpillar. From the spinning of the cocoon , to the enzymes that are released that digest all the caterpillar tissue, to the “imaginal disks” that will become wings, to the chrysalis, to a sort of rich ‘sludge,’ and eventually to a newly formed butterfly – it's hard to imagine a better metaphor for transformation, and for the death and resurrection of Jesus. The butterfly ‘dies’ as a caterpillar, is buried in the cocoon for a length of time, and emerges in a new life. This is the story of a creature who has the ability to transcend the ordinary and take flight into the heavens.

Butterflies, Bunnies, and Frogs! We use symbols and metaphors for resurrection because that's what's accessible to us. Plain language fails us, because what we proclaim today is something that is simply beyond the ability of human beings to express in a way that the thinking mind can understand and embrace. Of course, that's never stopped us from trying!

But St. Paul gets the challenge and says this: “Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.” (1 Cor 15: 51-52).

Mystery! Paul uses that word at least 15 times in his authentic letters. It appears only 5 times in all of the rest of the New Testament. And he uses that word – mystery – when all other words are insufficient. In the end, the greatest theologian Christianity has ever known lapses into metaphor, and then into silence. Only by analogy or story, it seems, can we access the meaning of this day.

And so hear’s a story: Among the community that is called “Native” or “First Nations” Americans, there’s a story told about *The Butterfly People and Their Wings* – it’s the story of a young butterfly whose mate was killed in battle. In her grief, she wrapped her wings around her, then wrapped herself in a plain shawl and hid herself in her lodge. Other butterflies – family and friends – stopped by to console her, but she was wrought with grief. Not wanting to be a burden to her butterfly tribe she left them and journeyed far and wide.

As she traveled – now walking, for her wings were useless – across the streams and rivers in her way, she would step lightly on the stones that formed a pathway, her eyes downcast. It was in this way that she spotted a beautiful stone and her grieving heart was healed. Filled with gratitude for a new life of joy and renewal, she shrugged off the shawl, unwrapped her wings and began to dance a joyful dance. And she went home.

When she arrived back to her tribe she told her People of the journey she took and the healing stone she discovered. In celebration, the People fluttered their wings and danced to celebrate a new beginning. If, today, you go to a First Nations gathering, you will often see the butterfly dance, danced using brightly adorned shawls.

Not only is Christ transformed through his experience of the tomb, he becomes the healing stone for his community – for us. From fear of death to the courage of faith. From sorrow to joy. From hatred to forgiveness. From arguing with God to trust in God – that’s the experience of the first followers of Jesus, even when they know that they don’t know. Through the experience of the cross and the empty tomb we, too, can move from fear of death to the courage of faith. From sorrow to joy. From hatred to forgiveness. From arguing with God to trust in God – even when we know that we don’t know

For this day reminds us that we are made to dance like butterflies, as it calls us to return home into the heart of God.