

Emerge



A Guided Reflection Journal

Week One

Tombs and Cocoons: Trusting the Dark



The butterfly and its process of metamorphosis has a long history, even before it came to be a Christian symbol for death and resurrection. During this season, we will consider what it means to be a people who believe that transformation is possible — that we can move beyond the leaves we find ourselves on and turn into beautiful beings that can fly to new heights and see and experience the world in the sweetest of ways, tasting and perpetuating the nectar of goodness.

The caterpillar's instinct about cocooning — entering the nurturing dark of gestation — is paralleled in the story of Jesus' life nurtured in the womb of Mary, the dark of the burial tomb from which he emerged, and our own willingness for transformation.

“Emerging” is inherent in the Christian story and in our story as followers of Jesus. But it also means trusting the Divine when we aren't sure what's “next” for us. Will we allow ourselves to trust in the dark where transformation begins?

Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.
- from Luke 1: 26-38

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.
- from John 19: 38-John 20: 1

Questions for Metamorphosis

In the dark of the womb we wondered...
...what could be better than this warm and safe place?
Once we were birthed into this life, at times we wondered...
...could there be more than meets the eye?
In the dark of the tomb-times of our existence we wonder...
... is there life beyond these constraints?
When we hear the story of Jesus we wonder...
... is new life possible for me?

Holy One, we come before you trying to accept more fully the beauty of the darkness as a place where birth and resurrection begin. Allow us to trust your timing for our lives — the timing for our full opening. Help us to experience times of cocooning as places where you are remaking us into that which you created us to be. And assure us that we are not alone. We are cradled in your presence. Help us to offer this reassurance to others.

Butterfly Fact: When caterpillars form a chrysalis and begin metamorphosis, their bodies break down into a goo. Have you ever felt like a "goo" on the inside when you've gone through a profound transformation? What does change feel like in your body?

Week Two

Coming Out: Leaving Comfortable Places

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was



more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” — Anaïs Nin

A caterpillar forms a chrysalis and stays inside for a time while the magical process of metamorphosis occurs. And a day comes when that protective shell is too constricting — the butterfly within must break free! Let's encourage one another out of our comfortable places so that we may truly bloom.

As ever-emerging spiritual creatures, we cannot contain our selves — the selves God has created us to be. Coming out as people and as a church from what we have known into a new identity is filled with anxiety and unknowing. Emerging will take effort and surrendering to “the assurance of things hoped for” even though we cannot yet see what the future holds.

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

- from Hebrews 11: 1-3

Questions for Metamorphosis

Safe in our cozy cocoons we wondered...

...does anything really need to change?

While the world rushed on around us, we wondered...

...what if I'm just not ready for whatever comes next?

When we fold our true selves down in order to fit inside the old container, we wonder...

...am I truly honoring myself by staying in this shape?

When our worldviews are painfully challenged by new information, we wonder...

...could this discomfort indicate an opportunity for growth?

Holy One, we turn to you for guidance to sense the edges of our comfort zones and listen for your call to stretch beyond them. Help us to embrace difficult times and moments of uncertainty with peaceful hearts. Give us courage to shift in new directions and to break free from the patterns and habitual grooves that keep us from moving forward into new life. We find safety in you and hope for a brilliant, colorful future. Help us extend this courage to others.

Butterfly Fact: Caterpillars carry their butterfly DNA in the form of "imaginal cells," tiny dormant building blocks of information that will eventually awaken and form a new creature. What are some "imaginal cells" in your life? In other words, what dreams, intuitions, or instincts have you followed into new life and transformation?

Week Three

Open: Into the Light



There are times in our lives when we must learn to see the world differently. Caterpillars have limited vision and are only able to sense changes in the intensity of light. When they become butterflies, they are gifted with a completely new eye structure that allows them to form images and take in a huge range of colors — even more than the human eye! Let us who have limited vision in this life be reassured by God's presence, even when we cannot know what lies ahead. Let us open ourselves to the light of enduring hope.

The story of faith is not one of arrival but of journey. The new butterfly's struggle to push out of its confines produces a fissure that cannot be undone. There is no going back, the journey to a new existence has commenced. The post-resurrection story of Jesus opening the hearts of his fellow travelers along the road to Emmaus invites us to be companions of the one who will open us into the light of a new day.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished from their sight.

- from Luke 24: 28-49

Questions for Metamorphosis

On the long road of our faith journey, we wonder...

...what lies ahead along the path?

Through all our in-between stages of transformation, we wonder...

...where am I going, and where am I growing?

As we search for direction in life, we wonder...

...how can I trust when everything is so uncertain?

Moving into new paradigms and perspectives, we wonder...

...what will be revealed when I open up to new possibilities?

Holy One, we come to you in prayer, asking for you to cast your light upon all that cries out for change in our lives and in our communities. Long ago on the road to Emmaus, Jesus opened the eyes of his traveling companions and gave them the gift of new sight. Shine your compassion into the cracks of our broken-open worlds, and help us be a beacon of peace and connection for others.

Butterfly Fact: Caterpillars and butterflies have very different eye structures. Caterpillars can only tell the difference between light and shadow, while butterflies can see a huge range of colors - even ultraviolet light! How does transformation enable us to see the world differently, perhaps with less black-and-white thinking and a broader spectrum of color?

Week Four Unwrap: Waking Up



The wheel of the year keeps on turning. Summer fades into fall, winter melts into spring, and nature sings a never-ending story of life, death, and renewal. Butterflies show us how to unwrap the gift of everyday life when they break forth from their chrysalises as new creations. We celebrate the effort that breaking into new life takes as we awaken to the rich blessings of this present day.

In the opening of the tomb of Lazarus, in the unwrapping of his funeral clothes, the community had to face their unknowing — and perhaps disbelief — and trust that the resurrection Jesus had facilitated was real. The range of emotions was vast. As the butterfly's cozy environment cracks further open still, it is the effort of the process of emerging that makes change possible — waking up, rolling away the stone, unwrapping what will be.

*When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."
- from John 11: 1-44*

Questions for Metamorphosis

In the silence of the tomb, we wondered...
...what force could be stronger than death?
When our dreams died and our safety nets split, we wondered...
...what do I do now?
Stumbling through our days half-asleep, we wonder...
...will I ever awaken from this feeling of numbness?
When we hear resurrection stories, we wonder...
...is there a new beginning for me too?

Holy One, we cry out to you from the parts of our lives that feel numb, stale, and dormant. We long to be resurrected from the deaths of our spirit, to reawaken as newly formed creatures in your kin-dom on earth. Help us to heed your call to "Come out!" of our lifeless shells and cast off the bindings that keep us from breathing free. May we be a community of second chances and fresh starts each and every day.

Butterfly Fact: A newly emerged butterfly often leaves behind a couple drops of reddish fluid as part of the "waking up" process. This fluid (called meconium) looks a little like blood, but it's just waste material. Have you ever felt pain in the process of transformation? Do we sometimes avoid changes because we want to avoid the pain that comes with it?

Week Five

Unfold: Claiming New Possibilities



We all come into this world as seeds of potential. Just as mighty oak trees grow from tiny acorns and beautiful butterflies grow from humble caterpillars, each one of us is gifted with unique potential for growth and transformation. As we continue our journey through the “Emerge” series, we dare to imagine unfolding our wings and claiming our space in this beloved community.

Once out of the cocoon, the new butterfly has much to do to prepare for flight. Wings are not yet ready. Small and undernourished, they long for expansion — to move beyond this awkward in-between-ness. As we consider our own metamorphosis, we remember how Jesus renamed “Simon” as “Peter” — a description of “the rock” upon which the church would be built. Are we willing to accept that God’s possibilities may come in ways we never imagined, perhaps expanding our notion of who we are in this world?

"...I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

- from Matthew 16: 13-20

Questions for Metamorphosis

When we arrived in this world, we wondered...

...from where will I get my sustenance and care?

When we were children, we wondered...

...who will I become on this adventure called life?

Change can make us feel awkward and fragile, and we wonder...

...how can I move through this change with grace?

When we give ourselves permission to dream big dreams, we wonder...

...how can I realize that vision?

Holy One, we are hungry for meaningful lives and fulfilling relationships. We thirst for your justice and mercy. Stretch our hearts and minds as we expand into the fullness of your love, reaching out to build new connections, to generate fresh ideas, and to do more acts of goodness in the world. We are anchored in your love and held by your grace. Help us lift high the ones in our community who are in need of loving care and support.

Butterfly Fact: When butterflies first emerge, their wings are not yet ready to support them in flight. They pump their wings full of fluid from their abdomens, inflating the wings so they become strong and full-size. What is the fluid pumping up your wings lately? What resources or sources of nourishment do you need to keep growing?

Week Six

Let Go: Leaving Behind What We Don't Need

Just as butterflies leave behind their chrysalises, baby birds break out of their shells,



and snakes shed their skin, we too discard old parts of ourselves in order to keep growing. We go through changes in work, in family structures, in friendships, in our own beliefs and values, all throughout our lives. When we give ourselves permission to say 'yes' to new experiences and ways of being, that often means letting go of old habits and patterns, a kind of decluttering the mind, body, and spirit. This week, we will ponder what it means to release what is no longer necessary so that we might make room for positive changes.

Stretching to the fullness of new potential, the butterfly begins to sense the calling to new heights. Expansion of wings, however, means something profound — it cannot ever go back into the cocoon. Not even if it wanted to. And so it is time to leave it behind. The Israelites that left Egypt were aching for freedom and yet when faced with the disorientation of all that was new and familiar, many began crying to go back. Letting go of the past requires deep trust in the God who has promised to be with us always.

The Lord spoke to Moses, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

- from Exodus 16

Questions for Metamorphosis

While our spiritual ancestors were living in Egypt, they wondered...

...how long must we endure this oppression?

When they left Egypt and followed Moses in the desert, they wondered...

...is this really any better than our old life in Egypt?

When we feel the urge to make a change in our lives, we wonder...

...how much longer can I go on like this?

When we consider the cost of change, we wonder...

...what is the cost if I stay the same?

Holy One, we come to you seeking the wisdom to discern what to hold onto and what to let go. When we know what is no longer serving us, we need courage and strength to make a change. Help us to release the thought patterns and behaviors that are keeping us from moving forward into healthier ways of being. Comfort us in our moments of loss and doubt, because we know that letting go can be painful. May we offer this comfort and grace to all who are ready for transformation.

Butterfly Fact: A chrysalis is a hard exoskeleton that the caterpillar forms when it's time to transform. The chrysalis keeps the caterpillar safe for a time during metamorphosis and is ultimately discarded when the new butterfly is ready to come out. What safe spaces and comfort zones have you outgrown? Does our protective armor sometimes impede growth?

Week Seven

Journey: The Places We Will Go



This week is the culmination of our journey through the “Emerge” series where we have focused on metamorphosis and resurrection through the metaphor of the butterfly. We celebrate the life of this beloved community by honoring our traditions and looking to the future with hope, faith, and joy.

Oh, the colors, the beauty, the unabashed and exuberant expression of all that we are together! This celebration is like none other — brought to its fullest embodiment as we emerge and dare new heights! In the emerging of the church in the book of Acts, a series of events in the life of Peter lead him to the understanding that God shows no partiality and all are welcome in this journey of new life in Christ. Upon this rock, the Spirit builds a church that offers hope to the hopeless, strength for the weary and new life to those who think theirs is over. Upon these things, this church will continue this mission to a world that so desperately needs a people who know the power of transformation!

*Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ — he is Lord of all."
- from Acts 10: 34-36*

Questions for Metamorphosis

Through growing pains and awkward phases, we wondered...

...am I always going to feel this way?

Before we came to this community, we wondered...

...where could I find a spiritual home?

We all come from different backgrounds and hold different views, and we wonder...

...how can we faithfully hold space for so many differences of opinion?

We look to the future of our church and our world, and we wonder...

...where will God call us to go next?

Holy One, we give thanks for your gifts of resurrection, transformation, and forgiveness. Help us to trust that you are with us always, today and every day, as we journey forward into new experiences and ways of co-creating your kin-dom. Allow us to get curious about the ways in which we can bring your love and light to this world. We are your messengers, your creations, and we lift up all the people and places that are calling out for your renewal.

Butterfly Fact: Each year before winter, Monarch butterflies undertake a truly heroic journey from as far north as Canada and all across the United States to the Gulf of Mexico. Some Monarchs travel more than 3,000 miles during this migration! Where are you feeling called to go next in your life? What journeys have you taken to renewed life and freedom?