

Maybe it doesn't happen as much anymore because of video games, TV, and kids being inside. Maybe it still happens. I can remember in the spring of the year finding on the playground or in my front yard these creeping crawling hairy multi legged creatures called caterpillars. They came in different colors, green ones, brown bushy ones. They were pretty slow movers so they were easy to catch. When you grabbed one and showed the teacher or mom or dad they asked if you wanted to put it in a jar. The innocence of a child, we had no idea why mom would want this bug in a jar in the house, but if mom was saying okay then go for it. All along mom or dad or the teacher knew the secret. Something was going to happen. The true nature of a caterpillar would be revealed.

Having the benefit of living on this side of Jesus in history there's no question as to his true identity and true nature. Since Christmas we've been talking about it. Jesus is true man and true God. But his disciples during his earthly ministry and for many people still today, the true nature of Christ isn't always so easy to pinpoint. Peter, James, and John walked with Jesus for years. They knew him as someone who got hungry like they did, slept, and drank water like they did. Jesus walked and talked and interacted with people just like them. He was a human being. He claimed to be the Savior, the Messiah too. To their understanding that meant an earthly king, a ruler who would take over on earth someday and maybe even give them prominent positions of power. All along there was a secret yet to come. The true nature of Christ would be revealed.

I've collected a couple of caterpillars through the years. I brought them inside, put into a peanut butter jar with holes poked in the top. Caterpillars have to breathe of course. I picked up a stick to put inside the jar as well as some grass and leaves. Caterpillars like to climb and eat I figured. In went the caterpillar and the lid was closed. My teacher and parents told me that over the next couple of days I would see changes taking place. It was something called metamorphosis. Big word but an easy concept. The caterpillar would be undergoing some changes. As a kid to be able to say that I knew such a big word, and not only could say metamorphosis, but also knew its meaning was cool. Change. But seeing would be believing.

When confronted with the question of who Jesus was, his own disciples gave a good answer, a confession of their faith. He wasn't Elijah back from the dead. He wasn't John the Baptist either. Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, the Savior of the world. Immediately they received a lesson in what that meant because it was different than they thought. At the end of the chapter right before the gospel for today, Jesus mentioned **"that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again."** Jesus would suffer. Savior and suffer didn't go together for the disciples. But they needed to learn that because soon they would see that.

Six days later they were on a mountain away from the crowds, all alone with Jesus. That's when Jesus experienced metamorphosis. That's right. The word from your elementary school science books and watching caterpillars in a jar is the very one that the Bible uses to describe what happened to Jesus. *Morpho* means form or appearance in Greek. Remember the caterpillar, takes the form of a caterpillar. Jesus had the form of a human being. He was human. *Meta* added to the word means change. *Metamorphosis* means change of form. Remember what you saw when the caterpillar was in the jar for a while. It changed form. Jesus changed form on the mountain. The Bible says, **"There he was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them."** Jesus showed his true nature by changing his form.

What the disciples saw, what we read and picture in our minds this morning in the gospel, was Jesus in all his glory. Everyday Jesus was human. But hidden beneath his human flesh, veiled behind his human nature was another nature. Something kept hidden till the right time. He gave them and us a glimpse. Why? Why the glimpse of Jesus' glory? And why at that moment? To answer that we must remember what was coming. After the mountaintop experience Jesus was only weeks away from Jerusalem, Palm Sunday, and Holy Week. A week in which he would suffer and die. It's the suffering Jesus warned his disciples about. Suffering was coming, had to come. The disciples were getting a glimpse of glory now to help them when the suffering came later. Memories they could hold on to through the suffering times the Savior would experience just ahead.

Why doesn't a caterpillar start out in its truest form? Only God can answer that. Why didn't Jesus start out showing his glory? Why not always be gleaming white with a radiant face? That God does answer. It was for us. Jesus was human because we needed a human Savior who would suffer. Because of all our fighting and disagreements, plotting and revenge, seething and holding grudges. All our sins against God and against each other made a suffering Savior so necessary. Any Savior was going to have to be like us, human form, able to suffer, willing to die. So Jesus veiled his glory in human flesh to suffer and die. For you.

After a couple of days I forgot about my caterpillar in the jar. Then one day I looked inside, shocked at what I found. The peanut butter jar didn't have the caterpillar anymore. I was told the cocoon formed around him. And that now was time to wait patiently for something amazing. Every day I checked. Cocoon still there. Still there. Finally it was broken open. The creepy crawly hairy caterpillar was gone. Metamorphosis had changed the form of the caterpillar into a beautiful, colorful, winged butterfly. It was so beautiful I wanted to keep it and just look at it. But the butterfly needed to fly. So I opened the jar and away the butterfly went.

Like I wanted to keep the butterfly, Peter wanted to keep this moment with Jesus in his glory. **“Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.”** Shelters to let the moment continue, keep the glory around longer, skip the suffering, stay here and be glorified forever. That’s what Peter wanted, or seemed to want. He wanted all the glory without the suffering. Wouldn’t we want the same thing? We have. Get the promotion without extra work. Make friends without actually talking with people. Have the housework done without expending too much energy. Make the special moments last. Better yet, fill life with only special moments. But glory now doesn’t work that way. It doesn’t last, it can’t. Glory now isn’t real. We fabricate, imagine, and attach glory to things that can’t give glory.

Almost as quickly as it started, suddenly the moment was done. **“When they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.”** Things were back to normal. Jesus looked normal. They were still normal. But things were different too. Jesus had shown his glory. They had seen his glory. And Jesus promised glory to come. **“Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.”** It might be puzzling, why would Jesus not want them to share? Whatever his reasons, they were his own. But did you catch the promise? **“Except Jesus...risen from the dead.”** Jesus was still with them. Suffering would come. Jesus would still be with them. Death would come to Jesus. But Jesus would still be with them after because of his resurrection. There’s the glory, in resurrection. The glory revealed in the transfiguration would go through suffering and death and come out in glory on the other side. Glory everlasting. Glory victorious. Glory that would be theirs. Glory that is yours.

The transfiguration glimpse of glory is now no longer a glimpse. Jesus is in his glory. The resurrection has taken place. Victory has been declared over sin, my sin and your sin. Death has been defeated. Jesus, the one who took on human flesh and veiled his glory like a caterpillar is now the beautiful glorified Savior Jesus who rules over all things from heaven and is with us always. He has burst forth in victory like a butterfly. That is the image God wants us to have of Christ. Glorified, victorious, our Savior. A glorified Jesus overcomes heartache and problems. A victorious Jesus does not let doubt win in us or let fear rule in our hearts. Look at Christ Jesus in his glory and know your glory is yet to come through him. Each of you has beauty in your future, a change of form, from sinful human to glorified eternal resident of heaven. Because of Christ that is your hope. Because of Christ that is your guarantee. Your Savior in his glory will bring you to glory too.

Metamorphosis in God’s world is amazing. It’s a beautiful picture of God’s amazing grace for you. It’s a beautiful way of thinking about Jesus’ transfiguration. Glory at one time hidden in Christ for a moment beamed out on the mountainside. That glimpse is your hope giving you confidence during the darker days of Lent when we will remember our sins and the price necessary to be paid for them. That glimpse of glory is also more than a glimpse today. Your victorious Savior in his glory achieved a glory that will be yours. You wait, like a child waiting for a caterpillar to change into a butterfly. You wait for your sinful body to be raised like Jesus’ glorious body. You wait for the final victory, a change of form, to glory in your Savior that will last forever.