



LESSONS for LIFE

January 4, 2008 11:00am & 7:00pm

PART 1: THE BUTTERFLY

Rev. Dr. Brent Hawkes, C.M.

SACRED READINGS

Lesson: 2 CORINTHIANS 5: 16 - 17

Gospel: LUKE 5: 36 – 38

So it's a new year and for some of us new year's resolutions are an important part of that process. Some folks have spent some time over the last few days examining their life and what's working and not working; and some folks have given up on the idea of resolutions and have gone instead to setting goals for what your life might look like this year. Some of you are just thankful that 2008 is over. How many of you are in that situation where you're glad 2008 is done? (A few congregants raised their hands). Thank you. I hope that this sermon today and indeed this series of sermons this month might give you some tools for dealing with some of the challenges you face, for I know from hearing from our deacons and hearing from some of you directly the past few months have been difficult. Some of you have lost important family members; for some of you it has been difficult in terms of health issues. For others the economy has meant that for some of you who've been retired some of you have had to come back and take jobs again in order to make ends meet, and others are worried about what the changes in the economy will mean. Some of you have had difficulty around relationship issues. So whether that's where you're at today or if that's maybe something you'll face in the future I'm hoping that this sermon series will help you to deal with that in a better way; and I'm hoping that this sermon series will also help us as a church, for Jesus said, *My purpose in coming is that you might have life and that you might have that life more abundantly.* And so how can we individually and as a church experience that abundance of life that Jesus was talking about? You may have noticed in the two scripture readings this morning the theme of newness. Jesus said that you don't put the new wine into old wineskins. You don't put the new unshrunk piece of cloth on an old garment. New must match up with new. And the early church got that message and we heard in the second reading - and a little later on the writer said that if you were in Christ, if you were following this teacher named Jesus then the old has passed away and all things become new.

Now I know some of us, and I'll speak for myself personally, I know some of us experience challenges with the newness. We'd rather hold on to the old stuff, the way it was, the traditions we have and many of those are valuable and important and teach us much. However, we also have to recognize that life renews itself through newness and new experiences and new ways of doing things and we need to be looking at how we might do things differently. Last year was the 35th anniversary of this church and we spent a lot of time last year looking at the past and celebrating our past: some of the joys and challenges of this church in its first 35 years. That was a healthful experience. Today also we could look back at last year and look back at 2008 and recognize in that year some wonderful accomplishments: over 150 worship services on Sundays plus PRIDE and Christmas Eve. Great music at our services with our regular musical program and guests; the wide witness that our church has in the world; hosting the triangle program, the world's oldest GLBT high school here in our building because of your generosity. Pastoral care exhibited by our deacons and others; our support of our denomination around the world by giving ten percent of our offerings, and an additional two percent to help the



LESSONS for LIFE

Canadian churches, and an additional two percent to help start or strengthen other churches in eastern Europe. Great educational programs, a growing and exciting Sunday School, social programs, men's retreats and women's retreats, weddings, baptisms, funerals, refugee and immigration support are just a few of the things that are regular happenings here. More we'll mention in the coming weeks.

We can also look at some new initiatives we made last year: the hiring of a new Executive Director. You know, I've been here awhile as Pastor of this church and during that time some of you have helped me to recognize my strengths and my weaknesses and having an Executive Director to be able to run the place in a more professional way is indeed a blessing to you and to me this year. Web-casting our services – already e-mails from lots of folks thanking us for the opportunity to participate in the life of our service when they can't get here because they're living halfway across the world or because they're sick at home and still able to worship with us. We supported the conference of Canadian MCC churches held here in our church. We pledged to help to get a new Pastor moved to Halifax and cover some of the costs. Those are just some things out the top of my head in terms of new initiatives last year, but it's time now for us to move from celebrating our past and to look at the future and to take flight. And so that's going to be our theme over the next four Sundays. We're going to look at nature and human accomplishments to see how we might take flight individually and as a church.

So this morning we're going to begin by learning some lessons – surprise – from the butterfly in terms of how the butterfly takes flight and what we're going to - there's a little clip we're going to show as part of my sermon, and I'd encourage you to exercise both your eyes if you want to watch the clip and your ears to hear me as I continue the sermon, because I don't want to stop and take two minutes and thirty seconds out of my sermon time and so I'm going to keep talking while you listen and watch. This clip will show you a butterfly actually breaking from a cocoon and getting ready to take flight and when you look at the science behind this it is absolutely amazing and there are some good lessons for us in this. The first thing I'd like to point out: Scientists tell us that when the caterpillar enters the cocoon and all that work of transformation is happening before the breaking forth – as you're seeing, - before we actually get to that stage – that the caterpillar has within it the DNA and all of the resources it needs for transformation, already before the transformation occurs. All that is needed is already there and I want to use that as an illustration that when you enter difficult situations, when you enter times of transformation and change, even when it's forced on you from outside, that you already have within you the resources within you to be able to handle that transformation. Everything is already there in your DNA, everything you need to handle that transformation is already within you. So when you experience those transformations, be reminded of the caterpillar and the resources that are there. That's also true for us as a church. The scripture says that all the resources we need God has already given to us; they're already here. We talk of these as facility needs, volunteer needs, financial needs, skills, needs, etc. they're already here. I find it absolutely amazing when I hear your stories – the resources that are here and the experiences, the training that you have had, and what a gift that is to us as we take a look at our transformation as a church.

And so the first lesson is: the caterpillar already has within it the resources needed for the transformation. The second lesson: something has to die in the caterpillar-ness in order the transformation to occur. Unless you want to stay in that muck – and if you look you're able to see inside a cocoon during the transformation period and it's pretty mucky, and unless you want to stay in the muck something has to die in order for the transformation to occur. It's important that when you face those times of loss it's really important for you to be able to take time to grieve the loss, to not too quickly jump into the new and for some it's important to ritualize that loss and to be able – whether it's a



LESSONS for LIFE

relationship or a job – or health, to be able to spend some time grieving the loss of what was in order to move into the new. Something has to die.

I'm going to venture onto risky ground right now and say that one of the wonderful things about our church is the diversity that exists here. We have everybody from fundamentalist evangelical Christians to folks who would say they are on their spiritual journey and who would not define themselves as Christian at all. We have all kinds of range of different traditions. We have different ages; we have different economic backgrounds. We have people who define themselves as gay, people who would define themselves as straight and people who would not define themselves at all! Huge diversity in this place. It's a wonderful, wonderful gift, but at times it can be a real pain; and you know, all of us, if we're going to live together in community, all of us need to be prepared to give some things up. You may not like some of the language we use in worship and the changes we've made. You may like some musical experiences, you may not like other musical experiences. You may like some of the changes we make to worship; you may not like some of the changes we make to worship. Frankly, when we look at our worship experience there are two priorities that drive us: One. Our un-churched people who have no church experience and come here hearing foreign languages and don't understand it, so we want to make it friendly for un-churched people. Secondly, the next generations that are coming and what needs to be meaningful for them to help the next generation experience worship in new ways. So we're always going to be making changes and experimenting as we go along and some of them will last and some will last just a little while and then we'll say, well that didn't quite work and we'll move on, but all of us need to let something die in order for the transformation to occur.

Thirdly, we all need to go inside and do the necessary inner work. It's tough; it's painful sometimes to take a look inside and to examine what are the patterns that need to change in you in order for you to experience abundant life; and it's painful for us as a church to do the same thing, to take a look at what needs to change as a church. Every year our Board of Directors and our senior staff meet to plan the next year and we take a look at our goals and what our goals and budget need to be. And frankly we know that this year is primarily going to be a consolidation year. There are a few things that we are doing that are new that we need to expand but because of the economy it needs to be a consolidation year; and so when we meet in February to set the goals we bear that in mind this year and our financial goals as well. All of us need to do that inner work, that sometimes tough work at taking a look at what needs to change.

Fourthly, the emerging butterfly has to crowd itself out of the cocoon. As that butterfly begins to push out of the cocoon and the fluids in its body are transformed and moved then the butterfly has to. Yes, we can be there for each other; we can help each other in the midst of difficulties, crucially important for those of you who are in committed relationships – partners that help. For those of you who have circles of friends or families that help each other and we can do that as a church. We can be there for each other and with each other and help each other through the transformations, through the difficult moments. But there comes a point when each of us has to be responsible for our own transformation. As a church we are very blessed by many folks outside of our church and community who support us in a variety of ways, including financial support, but we also have to accept responsibility as a congregation that we are responsible for our own core budget and our own core financial support.

First lesson: the caterpillar already has the DNA to face the transformation. Secondly, something has to die in order to experience change. Thirdly, go inside and do the inner work that's necessary to see what needs to change. Fourthly, taking responsibility for your own transformation. And finally, the



LESSONS for LIFE

butterfly eventually has to spread its wings and release that beauty for the world. I was thinking as I was preparing this sermon – I wonder if a butterfly ever gets to see its own beauty. Now we're blessed with that awful thing called a mirror; we're able to see our own beauty, but I'm wondering if the butterfly ever gets to see its own beauty. Maybe if it flies over a lake or some water and looks down and is able to see how beautiful it is and I would hope that you might be able to recognize the beauty that God has placed within you; that you might be able to say in a variety of ways that you can see and experience and share the beauty that you have for the world.

When I look at our church I see the power of the spirit of God in this place. I see the power of our social justice work that we've accomplished together so far. I see the power of our witness to other denominations about how to be church in a different kind of way. In typical church language it's said we need your time, your talent and your treasures to help us to become the church that we are meant to be.

This morning, in your order of service, there are two forms that will be referred to in a bit more detail later: one is a volunteer commitment form and if you complete that Carol Newman will call you and arrange to talk to you and find out how you would like to volunteer, and we're hoping to set up a lot of new volunteers in the next few weeks and so we encourage you to think about that. We'll find something that will work for you. And the second is a financial commitment form. Every year when we go through the budget process we do a couple of drafts of the budget and we're always far apart. We have all of our dreams and hopes, etc., and then we have our revenue and there's usually quite a gap there. This year our budget's about 1.2 million and the gap was \$177,000. and that was after some cuts, and the Board of the church are absolutely determined to try to move forward, and yes, consolidate and be very efficient and effective with resources that you entrust to our care but we also want to be able to move forward and to do what expanding we can do within the current economic situation. And so when we meet in February we'll have some tough choices and what we'd like you to do is to consider making a financial commitment. Now two hundred and fifty some of you already do that by being sustainers and if you use this form to increase your gift that would be really appreciated but we would also like the other seven or eight hundred of you who are not sustainers to think about making a financial commitment or becoming a sustainer. A financial commitment can be for a period of a week, a month, a year or whatever you would like and so we'll gather these over the next few weeks and when the Board sits down in February they'll be able to use this to do our decision making this year and to determine what resources will go there..

What will that abundant life look like for you? How will you become new, a new person this year? What will abundant life look like for us as a church this year? How will we become the new church that God wants us to be this year celebrating our traditions, honouring the best of our traditions while transforming ourselves into the church God wants us to be where lives are touched, where hope is given and the world is changed. May we learn from the butterfly. Amen.