

Begging to Break Out

Mark 4: 35 - 41

In today's message, I was tempted to compare life's journey to the amazing migratory flight of the Arctic Tern. Each year it covers a distance of over 22,000 miles, travelling from the Arctic Circle all the way to the Antarctic Ocean and back again. They're probably heading north right now as I speak.

Then I thought, life isn't circular route: Where we're going, we've never been before. So, the Arctic Tern analogy is out.

Of course, I could have likened our life's journey to that of a salmon. As a small fry it leaves the protected shallows of the freshwater and ventures forth into the deep, wide ocean; then, in 2-5 years (or when the money runs out) it makes that long, perilous journey home to spawn. It's a great story right up until the end when they die from complete exhaustion and trauma from hurling themselves against the cold hard rocks. Now their lifeless carcasses float down the river to become a meal for all the other animals.

No, I decided the journey of life needs a new analogy and the best one I could come up with is that life, as glorious a gift as it is and as awe-inspiring as it can be, seems to me is more like a series of moltings rather than some epic journey.

Molting: that doesn't sound too inspiring, does it?

I grew up on a farm, and my mom always had a flock of chickens. I used to think it was so funny when the chickens molted and lost most of their feathers, but I don't think the chickens thought it was funny. To a chicken, molting is a very humbling experience.

It's neither a glamorous nor an exciting process to go through. It can happen unexpectedly, and when it does, it leaves the animal vulnerable until their new feathers grow in or its skin has time to toughen up.

But for many living things, molting is a necessity. Without it, they would not be able to grow to maturity.

Take for example the silkworm moth. It has a very similar lifecycle to that of the butterfly: egg, larva, pupa, butterfly/moth.

Interestingly, the silkworm larva or caterpillar will molt up to ten times before entering the pupa or the cocoon stage. The caterpillar molts, because it's eating constantly; causing its body to grow faster than its skin. Therefore, it sheds its OLD skin to make way for the new skin underneath. The new caterpillar is literally bursting to get out!

Wouldn't it be great if we could shed our skin all at once and get a brand new layer? It sounds so refreshing, but sadly, we'll just have to stick to the moisturizers!

But what am I getting at here?

Simple: as Christians, we're in the larval/caterpillar stage of life. We've hatched from the egg the moment we make a decision to follow Christ, we break forth from our shell and into an entirely new existence! We're a new creation! The old is gone the new is come!

I know some of you are going to get a bit squeamish thinking of yourselves as a caterpillar being hatched, but, in a sense, it's the truth!

The pupa stage can be seen as passing through death, while the butterfly stage is our resurrected life with Christ!

But I'm getting ahead of myself. We're still back at the caterpillar stage, and that's okay, because the caterpillar has a lot of work to do and a lot of ground to cover and a lot of leaves to eat!

And maybe this is how Jesus viewed his new disciples. They had a lot to learn and much to do and experience before they could be entrusted with the most important message ever given to mankind - The Gospel that brings salvation to all who believe.

In order for the disciples to be faithful messengers they would have to grow in faith and mature spiritually. They would have to go through a series of "moltings".

Now remember, when a caterpillar or snake or whatever animal molts, it doesn't necessarily change its outward appearance. What it does change is its size or capacity.

This is what Jesus wants for his first disciples, and for us! Jesus wants to exponentially expand the vision of these men so that they can know who they are serving/following. He also knows its going to be a shock to their minds and spirits, but its necessary to see if they'll follow him to the very end.

The disciples first test (or molt) begins shortly after Jesus appoints the twelve to be apostles. I would think this group was feeling pretty good about themselves, knowing that they made the final cut, but as the Bible describes in Mark 4, the new recruits were in for a rude awakening.

"That day, when evening came, he said to the disciples, 'Let's go to the other side.' Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped."

When Jesus finally calmed the storm, the disciples were terrified. And who could blame them? But I wonder what scared them more?

The weather and storm that threatened to drown them or the realization and revelation of who was in the boat with them?

If we are to continue to grow in our faith, we can never stop asking the question: Who is this, who's in my boat?

We don't ask this question because God changes- God never changes- but because our perspective of him changes as we continue to personally experience his salvation in our lives. We ask it because God is so wondrous, so big, so mysterious that even eternity will not be enough time to measure the greatness of our Lord, yet He wants to be known – and it takes time to know him on different levels.

This is why He sent His Son Jesus – the image of the invisible God, the exact representation of His being – so that all who place their faith in Him might begin knowing the God who creates, loves and saves.

God already knows everything about us, He invites us to get to know Him through His Son Jesus.

A second growing or “molting” experience for the disciples happens in Mark 5:35-43 when Jesus raised the little girl from the dead. The Bible says that Peter, James and John were right there at Jesus' side and, at the miracle, they were “astonished”.

It's one thing to be brought back from the brink of death as the disciples were on the boat, but it's another thing to see the dead actually return to life at the hand of your leader.

Could their minds and hearts grasp what just occurred? Hardly! But something even more precious than physical life had been stirred within them! They had just witnessed the Author of Life return life to the deceased.

Our faith undoubtedly grows when we see God working in the lives of others.

Real growth also occurs when we experience God working through us personally.

This is exactly what happens in Mark 6:7-12 when Jesus sends out the twelve to preach the Good News and heal the sick. The disciples experience first-hand the power of God flowing through them for it was Christ who gave them the authority to cast out demons and heal diseases.

And later, when a large mass of people had followed Jesus to a desolate place, Jesus tells the disciples to meet their physical needs, Mark 6:30-38: *"You give them something to eat"*, He says. Wow! Talk about a growth opportunity, and overwhelming task!

I think one of the main reasons we fail to see God working in our lives is because we see the task ahead of us as too big, too daunting, so we become overwhelmed and do nothing. We become paralyzed. But what does God tell us to do?

It's plain in the Scriptures. Jesus says, *"How many loaves do you have? 'Go and See"*

In other words, Step 1: Assess your God-given resources.

Step 2: Be faithful in using what you already possess.

Step 3: Give thanks to God and watch Him multiply your efforts.

It's tempting to look at the village of Almont and start bemoaning the fact that there are too many people with too many needs. And we're such a small church- how can we ever begin to make a difference?

Well, the answer is here:

- 1) Let's assess and take inventory of our resources
- 2) Let's be faithful in using what God has given us.
- 3) Let's give thanks to God in all things
- 4) Let's watch God multiply our efforts.

Moltings / Spiritual growth can also happen in Mountain Top Experiences like it did for Peter, James and John when they experienced Christ's transfiguration in Mark 9.

Spiritual growth also happens in moments of deep sorrow and repentance of sin as was true for Peter in Mark 14 after he disowned Jesus 3 times. The Bible says Peter *"broke down and wept."*

The common denominator in both events is that God's truth was revealed.

Mountain Top: Jesus' holiness and eternity

Sorrow/Repentance: Jesus' omniscience (all knowingness)

The question for all of us is will we humbly receive God's truth by faith?

If we do, prepare to molt, because God's life will grow too big in us to be contained, and God's life will spill out of our lives into the lives of others.

Think about Peter, who after hearing of Christ's resurrection from the women, couldn't contain himself, but ran straight to the tomb to see for himself.

Did he run to the tomb because he was skeptical of the news?

No! He ran there to confirm what he already knew to be true in his heart. Because his heart was already overflowing with knowledge and love of God. Is God getting bigger in you? Then prepare to molt!

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:18, *"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in Love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."*

When we're filled with God, we can't help but molt and ultimately be transformed into the likeness of His Son.