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Resurrection Reminder

April 2011



by Sue Edison-Swift

Butterflies are symbols of Christ's resurrection. I know why.

After a worship service two summers ago, I claimed my first Monarch Ministry kit: a days-old Monarch caterpillar in a Dairy Queen cup habitat, a snack bag of cut-up milkweed leaves (a Monarch caterpillar's only food), and a sheet of instructions. I peered into the DQ cup to meet my caterpillar. "Humph," said a boy with a caterpillar twice as big as mine, "Your caterpillar is *tiny*."

"Yes," I said, just a bit offended for my little one; "It's *tiny and mighty*." With that, my caterpillar had a name, "Tiny Mighty," T.M. for short.

T.M. spent his first day with me happily nibbling a hole in a piece of milkweed leaf.

The next day T.M. didn't eat. That evening I left a new, fresh leaf. In the morning it was left untouched. Not one nibble.

I went back to my sheet of instructions, and read "Occasionally, the caterpillar roams away from the leaf for a day or so. It needs to rest and shed its skin." Still, I fretted. Life is so fragile.

And then T.M. started to eat, and eat, and eat. Each day it would devour two, then three, then four or more leaf pieces, leaving only the stems. I noted T.M.'s developmental steps with pride.

On the seventh day, T.M. attached itself to the top of the container and hung in a "J" position for 15 hours, laboring to transform into a chrysalis.

The actual transformation is dramatically hard work. T.M.'s skin split, revealing the green of the soon-to-be chrysalis. T.M. writhed to throw off its skin.

Death and Grief

After burying his beloved wife of 53 years, a dear man told me "Dying is not for wimps." It is hard work. Jesus has been there, suffering, dying. Jesus is here, Jesus is with us, as we journey into the valley of the shadow of death.

In less than 15 minutes, my caterpillar's work was finished. There was no sign of the caterpillar that had been. A beautiful chrysalis, adorned with a crown of gold dots, hung deathly still.

I knew the rest of the story. I knew that in eight to 12 days, T.M. would have a new and better life as a butterfly. Still, I missed the caterpillar that had been a part of my life for eight days. I missed a *bug*, even knowing with absolute certainty that its next journey would be taken on wing, and its next food would be as sweet as nectar.

The grief, the sorrow, the unimaginable loss that some must live with calls for nothing short of the Holy Spirit praying with sighs too deep for words. Jesus has been there, weeping with grief. Jesus is here, Jesus is with us, in our grief.

On the 10th day, early in the morning, the chrysalis was dark and transparent. Today would be Transcendental Monarch's (T.M. for short) birthday. As it happened, four of us needed to be on the road that morning, so the chrysalis came along: its container fit



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perfectly in a cupholder.

Miraculous and New

It takes just a minute or two for a butterfly to break out of the chrysalis. A vulnerable newborn, it then hangs on to the remnant of the chrysalis for two to four hours, pumping fluid to expand its wings and slowly spreading its new wings to dry.

T.M.'s outstretched wings revealed two dots: it's a boy!

Jesus was there, too, a vulnerable newborn. Jesus is here, Jesus is with us through all the miraculous and mundane days of our lives.

Three hours later, T.M. seemed ready. We pulled off to the side of a rural road and placed him on a wildflower bloom. That's the thing about butterflies, they are ours only to set free.

Last summer, my second-floor balcony sported a potted milkweed plant in addition to herb planters. Wonder of wonders, I found three *tiny*, one-day-old monarch larvae on my milkweed plant, which I named Trinity Monarch (T.M. for short) A, B, and C. The next day, Trinity D was discovered. Two days later, I spotted Trinity E ... the biggest caterpillar I have ever seen this side of a chrysalis.

After "Trinity E" was discovered, a Facebook friend wrote, "I love how the 'Trinity' keeps growing, rather like our vision of the expansiveness of God's love and grace. Enjoy the miracles!"

Resurrection and Life

The last discovered, Trinity E, was the first to fly away. T.E. emerged at the Lutheran Center and as I rode down the elevator to let him go, he climbed into my hair and sat there like a decorative barrette. He soared off the moment I walked outside. T.E. made three joyful loops around the courtyard before disappearing into the clouds.

The first discovered, Trinity A, was the last to fly away. He emerged as my daughter, Annie, who was serving as a resident hospital chaplain, attended the funeral service for a 5-year-old boy. Renamed in the boy's memory, this last butterfly took his time taking wing, cautiously taking short flights about the balcony before flying off into the trees. Annie used pictures of this butterfly to make cards for the boy's mother, grandmother, and brother. The boy's mother wrote back to say how much the cards meant to the family, especially to the grieving brother, who loves butterflies.

Butterflies are symbols of resurrection; Jesus the Christ is our resurrection and life. When you look up and see a butterfly on the wing, remember the women who looked up to see "the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back" (Mark 16:4). Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed!

Sue Edison-Swift held positions at the ELCA churchwide office from 1988-2010, including 13 years as managing editor of Lutheran Woman Today. See her blog – a hyphenated life – and related photos and videos. Sue and her husband, Paul Edison-Swift, are members of St. Luke's Lutheran in Park Ridge, Ill.

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