



I shared with the children this morning that I believe the chrysalis, the cocoon that develops around a caterpillar that makes for its transformation into a beautiful butterfly, is the best illustration I know of this truth. We say every Sunday here that the butterfly is a sign and symbol of what?—resurrection and life. Why do we say that? Consider the life of this creature of God. When that cocoon is formed, does that caterpillar just stay there? No. It must be released to be free. How is it released? It struggles and wiggles and shifts inside until it is free. But the creature that formed that cocoon looks so much different than the creature that is set free. Butterfly! It cannot be free until it faces the challenge of breaking out, gives itself fully to that effort. But the new life that comes forth, the freedom of flight and new life, that is a gift. A caterpillar, by its struggle, does not turn itself into a butterfly; that a gift,

Brothers and sisters, we are set free. What we become by the grace of God is never by the effort of our own discipline or hard work or determination. But when it comes to freedom, we want to experience that life; we want to be faithful. We need to be challenged. That's why you're here today, isn't it? We need to be challenged.

For example:

Are most of you fully satisfied with your prayer life? you need to be challenged

Do most of you live as faithfully as you would like?...you need to be challenged

Are you the very best parent, grandparent, son, daughter, grandson, granddaughter you can possible be, can get no better at it?...you need to be challenged

Are you the best student you can be? the best worker you can be? the best boss you can be? Are you living your retirement to the fullest to the glory of God and the fulfillment of others? You need to be challenged....

The church always walks a fine line when issuing that challenge, a challenge we expect, respect, and ask from the church. That fine line is this: how can we appropriately challenge those of us who need to be challenged to grow, without at the same time making those of us who

are already at the place in our spiritual lives where relationship with God is just right feel as if the church is saying you are not right with God at all. To use the example of prayer life...the fine line the church always walks with us is how to challenge those of you who need to be challenged to grow, to pray more, without at the same time saying to those of you who are already in a satisfying and fulfilled prayer relationship with God that you're not praying enough. When the church, when I as your Senior Pastor, issue the challenge to pray and you are already at a point in your own developed prayer life that you and God are really OK, please do not hear the church, do not hear me, saying to you that you are not praying enough. The church, your pastors, always just have to trust that you already know whether you are praying enough or not, so that when the church issues the challenge to prayer those of you who aren't respond to that challenge, and those of you are give thanks to God for that gift you already share and pray for rest of us to know that joy too.

There is no other area of our Christian discipleship where this fine line more starkly defined than in the practice of our Christian discipleship of giving. You see, some of us need to be challenged. Some of us need to consider seriously the call of the church to generous giving, especially now as we are invited to make a commitment to our new 3 year capital program in support of our building fund—this is a wonderful opportunity for us to respond to that challenge to grow as givers, to know that freedom that only those who practice the spiritual discipline giving while at the same time helping free the church of debt. Some of us need to be challenged in our giving; maybe many of us need to be challenge; maybe most of us need to be challenged. You expect the church, you expect me, you expect your pastors to issue that challenge to spiritual. But, if you are already giving at a level that you have prayerfully committed to God, if you and God are OK, please do not hear the church, do not hear me, saying to you this morning that you are not giving enough.

You see, we are set free. Whenever we choose to live this life of freedom we grow, we become more mature, we trust God more, we become more loving. It all becomes more natural for us. Trusting God every day, facing the future with confidence, being at peace with life, loving, trusting, giving...it all becomes more natural to us. We are set free to be who we are.

Unlike a caterpillar that follows its natural life cycle in struggling through the chrysalis stage and receiving the gift of transformation into a beautiful butterfly, you and I have a choice. In many ways it's pretty comfortable inside that cocoon. It's great to know and experience the love and acceptance of God, basking in the warmth of God's grace. But we have choice. There is something we must do. And so we are called to struggle, to shift around, to take up spiritual practices, to love one another, to give and give generously, and accept the that gift of freedom which is the grace of God transforming us into that image of God in which we were created. We are set free. We do not earn what we become, we accept it as a gift.

In this spirit we are invited to follow this path and step in the footsteps. In this season of the life of our church, our congregation has laid before us one particular path toward personal spiritual freedom through giving that will set us free from debt and, if you take the challenge to giving seriously, will surely set you free from a culture where money holds us all so captive.

Set free. We are set free--free to give, free to live the life that is ours through Jesus Christ our Lord. Follow these footprints. Stick to this path. Live the life of freedom.

As the Apostle Paul says, "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."

William G. Davidson