

Metamorphosis

Last Sunday after Epiphany – 2 Corinthians 4:3-6

preached at St. Paul's, Henderson, February 15, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

When I was at Virginia Seminary, Jenny, the boys and I lived in a rather nice apartment in suburban Alexandria. The particular complex where the seminary situated us was composed of twenty or so three-story buildings arranged around some nicely planted open areas. In spite of a couple of non-seminary neighbors who thought perhaps little boys should be seen and never heard, my guys spent a lot of time honing their once-prodigious soccer skills in the common areas. You probably can't tell from our basically sedentary, pop another movie in the dvd-player lifestyle now, but back then one of our favorite activities as a family was the evening walk through those common areas and into the little bit of woods that shielded the property from the fast-moving Van Dorn Avenue and the even faster-moving Interstate-395.

On just such a walk in the late fall of '93, I suppose, we came upon a fascinating, rather unusual looking worm. Actually, it was a caterpillar. We just *called* it a worm because Kyle, being about six and still dealing with a bit of a problem with his "r"s that he has gotten around nicely, had a real hard time with caterpillar. As I recall, it was about the size of my thumb, maybe a little bit longer. I was sort of a lime-green color with tiny orange spots along the side, those kind of icky caterpillar suction-cuppy feet, and little tufts of hair – though I suppose it's not really hair – sticking up at intervals along the top. With some begging and pleading and reminding about the wonders of nature and the importance of discovery and wonder to growing young minds, Jenny finally relented and we were allowed to take our worm into the apartment where Jenny loaned us a commodious glass jar with a stout lid. In Cub Scout fashion, the boys and I did some homework and found that the larvae of *actius luna*, the Luna moth, prefers to chomp the leaves of white birch, alder, persimmon, or hickory. We had no idea what any of those looked like, so we pulled leaves from whatever it was that was growing outside our window – but the critter liked them well enough to eat and grow for a couple weeks.

Then one day we returned home to find that our worm was gone and the jar was filled with silky webbing. When we pried off the lid and looked inside, we found a rather large, tent-like cocoon. We were gratified that we had witnessed, if not the construction then the result of the next phase of the creature's lifecycle. We re-secured the lid and, figuring he would want some peace and quiet, stowed the jar in the dark coat closet opposite the front door. Other than the occasional peek to make sure all was going well, if boringly, the jar was left unmolested.

The poor thing had the distinct misfortune – ultimately fatal, I'm sure – to undertake the next phase of its metamorphosis one dark night about this time of the year. The boys had been tucked safely into their bunk beds surrounded by their Star Trek–the Next Generation action figures. I was off at the library, either researching some scholarly work on the exegesis of a passage in Mark, or sitting at the circulation desk earning four dollars an hour toward my tuition by helping someone with *their* scholarly work on a passage in Mark. Jenny was curled up quietly in the living room, waiting for our seminary-student neighbors to return from a rare night out to retrieve their infant daughter who was sleeping peacefully in Jenny's care.

Now, to be fair, I didn't actually participate in the next part of the story. If you want the first-hand account, you'll have to corner Jenny at Coffee Hour or something. I can only tell the story as my poor powers of memory have recalled the frantic telling of it when I got home from the library that night. Nevertheless, I'm the one who's up here, so for now you're stuck with my version.

All was quiet, and peaceful, and calm... and dark. The apartment had settled into its late evening silence. When suddenly, there was bumping! And a rustling! And a scraping! Rachi the cat was curled up in the back bedroom with one of the boys, and the baby lay in her carrier-tote-layette-thingy, sound asleep like only babies can be. But in the darkness, the sound came again, this time louder, somehow more urgent! Somehow more intense! It became a thumping, rhythmic and insistent. It came from nowhere identifiable. And it came from... everywhere at once. It came from... the coat closet opposite the front door.

Jenny's fear and loathing of things that go bump in the night and her motherly instinct to protect her children gathered around her in the twilight of an evening suddenly alive with alien sound. She rushed to the kitchen and gathered her usual weapon of choice – the broom handle. Mindful of the baby still sleeping peacefully a few feet away, Jenny held the broom at the ready. She crept on tip-toe to the closet whence emanated the now-shuffling sound. She carefully cracked open the door and peered into the gloomy dark. And something looked back! There, clawing as with six *hundred* barb-ed feet, having managed to dislodge the lid that secured its captivity, the horrible three-foot-wide wing-ed beast slithered from its prison – intent, it seemed, on sucking the very nectar of life from man, woman, *and* child. With the strength of ten men, fortified as she was with the sap of motherly instinct, Jenny knocked the beast back into its glassy tomb, clamped down the battered lid, and with Herculean – no, *Athenic* strength pulled the case from the darkness and hustled it out into the cold night, before running back into the apartment and bolting the door between the beast and her children.

When I got home, I looked all over for the Luna moth – whose wingspan *can* be as big as four inches. I figured after watching it for – oh, four months, the boys might like to see the final, triumphant metamorphosis. But – no such luck. I suppose if it survived the rather cold darkness of the night into which it had been thrust, it eventually found another Luna moth and started the whole cycle over again.

We do not fully see, Paul says, we cannot fully *understand* the mature glory of what we are called to proclaim. We do not see, we cannot understand, we are blinded to the transforming, transfiguring power of the resurrection – for *us*. We do not see, we cannot understand the glory of God any more than Peter, James and John understood the overwhelming brightness of the mountaintop. But that's okay, Paul says, because we are not called to proclaim *ourselves*. We are called to proclaim the glory and the power and the brightness of Jesus Christ living *in* us.

The fullness of our metamorphosis as children of God will not be known until we stand before the heavenly throne. Like the frantic flapping of Jenny's nocturnal nemesis, *we* wouldn't know what to do if we *did* all of a sudden transfigure into the full glory that Christ has purchased for us. But in the meantime, one thing is certain: we are *not* to be content with staying where Christ found us, chubby little worms munching unproductively on persimmon or alder or hickory. We are called to stretch and to strain to understand the depth of God's mercy and grace. We are called to weave webs of transformation, not just for ourselves but for one another as well. Day by day, we are called unfold and extend ourselves, to be *transfigured* into the likeness and image of Christ, to become epiphanies of Christ's love, to day by day, *be* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

We are called to spread our wings to share that overwhelming light in everything we say, in everything we do, in everything we *are*.