

## FROM PASTOR MARC'S DESK

This past week, I was speaking with my friend, David, about the process a caterpillar goes through when it climbs inside its cocoon and begins its transformation process into a butterfly. David pointed out that while it's inside its chrysalis, the caterpillar's body actually completely dissolves altogether and is basically rearranged into a completely new body - the body of a butterfly. As Pastor Lawrence and I were talking about this later, we observed that it was hard for us to imagine any other organism that could survive something like this: having our bodies completely dissolve and then rearrange into a new body. A biological miracle of our natural world. Death and resurrection.

In many ways, life here in the office at Oxford Presbyterian Church feels a bit like we're in the cocoon. To the passersby outside, the church looks pretty much the same as it always has, but inside there's been a lot of activity (and a lot of change!) during this pandemic. For example, here in the main office area, there has been heavy construction of a new handicapped accessible bathroom. In the sanctuary, our speakers and AV equipment have been completely stripped down and replaced with modern new upgrades which include a capacity for live-streaming online. During the pandemic, I've made changes to my own office and even completely upgraded my own desktop setup. The old has been taken down, and the new has emerged in its place.

A few months ago as all this was going on, it was observed that when we are finally all able to gather together again safely, for some, it may feel like they're walking into a whole new space. After a season of tearing down, dissolving, and building back up again inside the cocoon, it is my hope that life after the pandemic (whenever that may be) will feel like a butterfly that has finally emerged.

This month, we enter into the season of Advent. Advent is a season of waiting and anticipation, but it is also a season of **preparation**. In the first chapter of Mark's Gospel twelve chapters earlier, the prophet John the Baptist proclaimed, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Mark 1:3, Matthew 3:3). Of course, when John the Baptist talked about preparing the way and making our path straight, he wasn't talking about renovating churches and buildings. He was talking about renovating our hearts.

This season of Advent and Christmas is very likely to look very different from any other Advent we have ever experienced before. In some ways, it may feel like some of the things that we long for during this season are dissolving before our eyes. We mourn that and lament that. However, just like a caterpillar dissolving inside its cocoon, God is at work in this and doing something new - both in our buildings but also in our hearts.

When John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, the Gospels tell us that the word he used was "Repent!" Now "repent" can mean to apologize when we screw up or do something that we shouldn't. However, in the Biblical Greek way that John the Baptist used it, it literally means "to turn around." To turn one's life around. To start renovating our hearts and some things in our own lives dissolve away so that a newer and more

faithful life can take its place. What are some of the things in your own heart, in your own life, in our community, and maybe even in our church that need to dissolve away and move in a new and different direction? Questions like these are how Christians prepare the way of the Lord.

One of the things that makes navigating a pandemic so hard is none of us knows how long we are going to live like this. We have some sense that the future likely holds some sort of “new normal” in store. What it will look like or when it will be is still a mystery. For the time being, all we can do is wait and prepare.

When the prophets like John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of the Lord in the fullness of time, they didn't know exactly what that might look like or what kind of timeline they could expect either. Jesus, himself, even said the same thing to his followers twelve chapters later. “About that day or hour,” Jesus says, “no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...therefore, keep awake...what I say to you I say to all: **Keep awake**” (13:32-37).

Year after year, Advent is the season where we, as people of faith, have tried to remember these ancient words and hear them through the lens of the moment in history that we happen to find ourselves in: **Keep awake** for what is God doing in and through you right now...and start making the renovations in our hearts to prepare.

This Advent season **will** be different from any other we have ever experienced, but in this important way, Advent will never change. Advent is when we take stock of our spiritual renovations and prepare the way of the Lord...and this one will be no different. So how will you keep awake this Advent? As a person? As a family? As a church? If we can do that, then perhaps what will emerge from the cocoon on the other side may be truly beautiful, indeed.

Blessings this Advent,  
Pastor Marc