

## Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

### Title: Like a Butterfly from a Cocoon

### Lesson: Luke 24:44-53

<sup>44</sup> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." <sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Friends, today is the last Sunday of Easter. It is the final Sunday of the Easter season, and it is also Ascension Sunday. On this last day of the Easter season, let us share the Easter greeting one final time: *Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed!*

**(Slide 1)** About a couple of weeks ago, it was a windy afternoon. I was standing in our front yard, watching the branches and leaves swaying in the breeze. Then, I noticed something amazing: a butterfly was clinging to one of those leaves. Despite the strong wind and the constant shaking of the branches and leaves, the butterfly held on tightly. Seeing this, I felt a sense of wonder and amazement at its strength.

As you all know, a butterfly must go through several stages to become what it is. It begins as an egg, from which a caterpillar hatches. The caterpillar feeds on leaves, such as milkweed, and grows through four or five molts. Eventually, it enters the pupa stage, forming a hard cocoon. Inside the cocoon, the caterpillar's tissues are almost completely broken down and reformed, giving rise to wings, legs, sensors, and more. Through this process, the caterpillar is transformed into a new life—a life it could never have imagined before. With newly formed wings, legs, and sensors, it emerges as a butterfly, entirely different from its former self, soaring freely through the sky with its wings spread wide.

During this Easter season, as I reflected on Jesus' life and resurrection, I couldn't help but feel that His journey shares similarities with that of a butterfly.

Jesus came to this earth as a small, tender baby, marking the beginning of God's great plan. As He grew, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, humbly beginning His public ministry as the Son of God. He taught people, proclaiming that He was the Son of God. He ate and fellowshiped with others, especially

the poor and the marginalized, and was betrayed by everyone. For the sins of us all, He suffered and died on the cross.

After His death, His body was laid in a tomb, and three days passed. Just as a caterpillar undergoes a transformation in the cocoon to become a butterfly, Jesus, during those three days, was transformed into a new body and a new life. Overcoming death, Jesus rose again. Through His resurrection, He forgave all who believe in His name and opened the door of salvation to everyone.

The passage we read today from Luke 24 tells the story of Jesus, newly reborn like a butterfly, promising to send the Holy Spirit to His disciples, blessing them, and ascending into heaven before their eyes.

Jesus' resurrection didn't just transform His own life—it completely changed the lives of His disciples who believed in and followed Him.

Friends, do you remember what the disciples' lives were like before Jesus' suffering? They were a mess. Though they claimed to believe in and follow Jesus, their hearts were still filled with misunderstanding, doubt, and fear. They expected nothing but success, so they couldn't comprehend that Jesus would suffer and die. As a result, they often argued among themselves about who was the greatest, constantly ranking each other.

When Jesus was arrested, suffered, and carried the cross, the disciples were nowhere to be found. Overwhelmed by confusion and fear, they fled. Some even denied Him, hiding in disappointment and despair.

But then, the risen Jesus walked into their homes and opened the doors of their hearts. He opened their eyes and ears. After encountering the risen Jesus, all the confusion, fear, disappointment, defeat, and guilt the disciples felt were transformed into joy and certainty. Meeting the resurrected Jesus, they no longer feared death. They believed in eternal life, obeyed Jesus' command to love one another, and became witnesses to His works.

Living as witnesses to Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection doesn't simply mean remembering His story. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus transformed our lives as well. Therefore, living as Christ's witnesses means experiencing how Jesus changes our fears, doubts, failures, and frustrations in our daily lives and faith journeys, and then living out that transformation in our lives.

Let me share a story with you. I've sometimes mentioned my parents to you before, and today, they're here with us.

My father majored in accounting in college. Back then, his greatest goal in life was to make a lot of money. At the time, he was dating my mother. I'm not sure if this is found in the U.S., but in Korea, there are places called *prayer houses*—

quiet retreats often located in rural areas away from the city. One day, my parents spent a few days praying at a prayer house, and during that time, my father felt a calling to become a pastor. However, he chose his own goal of making money over God's calling. After graduating college, he got a job in the accounting department of a company and worked there for about ten years. During that time, our family's financial situation was relatively stable.

But the more he pursued his goal of financial success, the more he felt an overwhelming sense of emptiness. Eventually, he could no longer deny God's calling and decided to accept it. I believe I was in first or second grade at the time. While accepting God's call may have been a good decision for him and for God, it wasn't exactly welcomed by his wife and son. After leaving his job, he went to seminary full-time, and our family began to face financial challenges. Right after getting ordained as an Elder, he planted a church—with no members, no budget, and little support.

He served that church plant for about twelve years, from my middle school years until I got married and came to the U.S. My father worked incredibly hard in his ministry. And he prayed constantly.

My father was like a tree stretching its branches toward the heavens, yearning for rain on a scorching summer day—he prayed almost all day long. Despite his passionate prayers and passion for ministry, his church grew a little, but not dramatically.

During those years, I often felt anxious and even afraid about our financial situation. In just six days, I'll be ordained at the Annual Conference—and it feels a bit strange to say this now—but back then, I was certain I would never become a pastor. Given that background, it's kind of remarkable, isn't it? That I'm now walking this path of ministry, answering God's call.

A few months after I got married and moved to California for my studies, my father was called to serve the church where he is currently ministering, and he has been serving there faithfully ever since.

On the past Memorial Day, my parents came to stay at our house. One evening after dinner, my father shared something with me. He said that the twelve years of church planting were an incredibly challenging time, and though he prayed fervently, there were moments when it felt like his prayers went unanswered. Yet, he now sees those years as a cocoon-like time—a time when God was training him to become a greater pastor. He said that if all his prayers had been answered immediately, he might have become prideful and relied on prayer itself rather than on God. Through his 12 years of church planting, he came to realize firsthand that the only one he should rely on and cling to is God. Through those years, God taught him the value of a single soul, and because of

that experience, he now serves his current church humbly, loving each member with all his heart.

As I listened to his story, I realized that God had healed and transformed my father. And something else struck me as remarkable: during those years we spent together, I had carried feelings of fear, anxiety, and sometimes, his ministry and our family's financial struggles left wounds in me. But as I listened to his testimony this time, I felt that God had touched his life and helped him see his church-planting experience in a new light. And through his testimony, I also felt that the fears, anxieties, and past wounds related to financial struggles that lingered in me were being washed away.

Friends, the resurrection of Christ is not just someone else's story—it's the story of our lives. By rising from the dead, Jesus Christ transformed not only His own life but also the lives of all who believe in Him, turning sorrow into joy, fear into certainty, and death into new life.

Living as witnesses of Christ means experiencing the transformation He brings to our lives and sharing that transformation with our neighbors.

When we find ourselves in difficult situations, the path ahead may seem dark and uncertain, or perhaps we've gone through tough times but still live with regrets, trapped by memories of past mistakes and failures. But I want us all to remember that God walks with us in every moment of our lives, and the difficulties we face are not the end but part of a cocoon-like time, preparing us to be reborn anew. Even if we don't understand it now, one day, when the Holy Spirit opens our hearts, we will see that our regrets, guilt, sense of defeat, failures, and mistakes don't remain as they are. Instead, they become the driving force for a greater life, slowly transforming us.

Friends, today we reflect on Jesus' ascension and await the Holy Spirit He promised. The risen Jesus is not merely someone who makes our lives "a little better"—He makes them completely new. He turns our fears into hope, our failures into grace, and our despair into life.

Therefore, living as witnesses of Jesus in this world means living out the reality of the risen Lord in our lives.

Friends, now is the time to spread our wings and soar in our respective places. Even if we find ourselves on a shaking leaf, we will not fall because the Lord is with us.

As we await the Holy Spirit and look to the ascended Lord, may we live today as witnesses of the risen Jesus in our lives. Amen.