

The garden wasn't necessarily huge. Its flowers weren't in their prime.

Its trees and stonework even looked a touch tired. The same could be said for our apartment in San Cristobal as well.

*Modest. Tired. Past its prime.*

To get into this small garden from our apartment, we needed to first walk past the hotel's garbage as collected by a large fenced-in container. Most of the trash was comfortably resting in nondescript baggies, but the smell and bugs reminded all that this was a very much a trash receptacle. Broken tequila bottles, dirty Kleenex, orange peels, used diapers and everything else imaginable was heaped into that caged container. With 50 rooms and two apartments, this Hotel in southern Mexico collected plenty of interesting refuse each day. The heap was truly a heap of tossed aside items—all were either unwanted or unneeded. To be crass, such a heap was simply thought of as “trash.” Not so for the one sculpture hanging inside the modest adjoining garden. Hanging a good 7 feet off the ground was a gigantic butterfly made entirely from rusted-out scrap metal. Unlike the glissning, glossy, glittery packaging of the Easter candy in your pocket, this butterfly was extremely raw and refreshingly authentic to the overall gospel story we've come to celebrate this very morning.

You see, the story of Jesus Christ is far from glissning, glossy or glittery.

Rather, it is a story of God's very son moving deep into the realities of this world. --Into the ugliest of our secret sins. --Into the most wrenching moments of our grief. --Into messy moments of our shattered relationships. --Into the frontlines of our fear and the backrooms of our shame. --Into the jaws of death. --Even into the many trash heaps within our lives.

Jesus has gone, is going, and will go into every frame of life where God's desires and designs for reality are either warped or twisted.

In every way, today's dramatic story of the resurrection is the exclamation point to this commitment. It reveals the enormity of sacrifice our savior is willing to embrace for this commitment. It also reveals the amazing risk God is willing to accept to fulfill such a commitment. It is good and even necessary to celebrate God's great exclamation point and realize its immeasurable gift in our lives and within all of creation. Of course, it is a gift that can never be taken for granted. --Jesus died. --Jesus rose from the dead. --Baptized into his name and into his path of salvation, we too die and rise again. --We, too, go from cross to empty tomb. --We, too, go from sin-saturated spikes of crucifixion to the sheer freedom and joyful delight of resurrection. **This is all gift. This is all grace. This is all generosity from a God who never gave up on us and who never saw us as mere heaps of trash.**

The apostle Paul was telling First Reformed Church of Colossae the same wonderful truth. God never gives up on us. Nor are we mere cinch-bags of unwanted or unneeded trash. Instead, we have been brought into the very story of our savior. As such, we are very much sons and daughter of the Most High. We are brothers and sisters in and with Jesus Christ—God's beloved family if you will. Since we share in Christ's very resurrection, Paul wants that Colossian congregation and this Trinity congregation to also reorder life through such a resurrection. “Seek the things that are above,” the apostle commends. “Set your minds—set your priorities—set your ultimate ambitions on the things that are

above” we are told. “Live out the resurrection.” “Make its joy the music of life.” “Punctuate darkness with its truth” Paul is saying. **How?**

Look at what verses 5-9 tell us.

We live the resurrection by putting to death whatever creates death in our life and in this world: *Impurity, greed, anger, malice, and even abusive language. Violence, hatred, jealousy, cheapened sex, and selfishness. Bigotry, resentment, apathy, gluttony and certainly pride.* In the waters of baptism and its life-long process of converting us into the fuller glory of God, we are to shed ourselves of such practices. Sure enough-- such practices bring death. Such practices **are** death. *In contrast (look here at verse 12), we are to robe ourselves in the resurrection-thick practices* involving compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness and above all, love. In other words, celebrating Easter means very little if it remains a mere historical event rather than the very means and direction for living itself. -  
--Because Jesus moved from death to life, so can we. --Because Jesus moved from hopelessness to hope, so can we. --Because Jesus moved from bondage to freedom, so can we. Remember, we are not passive outsiders to this amazing story of salvation. No, God has brought us into its truth. It (the resurrection) is our very identity and core theological dna. --No longer can we live as if death has the upper hand in our lives. --No longer can we behave as if this wider-world doesn't matter. --No longer can we act as if trash-heaps in our lives cannot be redeemed and recycled. *Resurrection from the dead happened in that tomb in Jerusalem. Resurrection from death is happening right now throughout creation. Resurrection from all death will be fully realized in Christ and through Christ in some unknown hour.* --This all means that the ugliest of sins can indeed be forgiven. --That the deepest of grief can touch comfort. --That the meanest of gang-banging punks can find purpose. --That the oldest of wounds can be healed. This is true within our lives. This is true with the person sitting next to you. This is even true for the most heinous person you can possibly imagine. --There is no trash-heap that cannot be redeemed and recycled. --No scrap metal that cannot be turned into a butterfly. --No individual that cannot be changed by the converting power of the *resurrection*. I'm not going to lie—allowing God to convert us and actively disrobing from those garments of pride, greed, cheap sex, violence and resentment is and always will be extremely tough work. Not too many weeks ago I needed to spend extra time in that trash-bin located next the garden. Something needed to be retrieved in the midst of rotting smells, charred glass, and bathroom waste. It is messy work to paw through your own trash—especially through and into those sins so deeply rooted that they've become comfortable and even normalized. To live into the intended freedom and joy of our resurrection, we must go especially into those places so that the power of the resurrection can do its work of healing, challenging, transforming, and restoring. Yes, taking off such death-doused garments may take years of such Spirit-powered work. It may take even take a whole lifetime of wrestling with self, sin, and God to do this type of messy, honest, humbling work. Of course, Easter isn't only about our personal relationship with Christ and the needed transformation in our own lives. Like the women darting out of the tomb to tell the rest of the disciples that morning, Easter is also about sharing such life-changing hope with the **rest** of the world. This is done by doing what Christ did with each of us in literally going into those places where hopelessness or fear or guilt or pain seem overwhelming or overpowering. Not even death could stop Christ's pursuit of extending God's purposes and passions into this world. **Not even death.** For us to follow our savior's example means wading through the trash-heaps of other people's lives not out of a posture of judgment or superiority, but in fullest humility, humanity, patience, and love. Even more specific, this means quietly sitting with a neighbor as she goes through chemotherapy for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time. This means actively supporting a relative as they enter rehab for the first time. This means offering a second chance to a friend that has betrayed you or to a loved one that has abandoned you. This means

learning Spanish to help a recent immigrant find better housing or mentoring a young 5<sup>th</sup> grader as she learns English down the street at Harrison Park. This means serving warm meals at the Community Kitchen and better yet, inviting someone from Community Kitchen into your own home for an even warmer meal of grace. All in all, wearing garments of our resurrection involves doing **everything possible** for others to experience us as butterflies—not glossy, glitzy, inauthentic butterflies—but rather as sinners redeemed through the blood of Christ—(and) as pieces of scrap metal recycled and renewed into raw beauty because of God’s pure generosity—that kind of butterfly. The kind that flies with utter excitement and exhilarating liberation because he or she knows what it is like to be stuck in a cocoon. The kind that flies with pure gratitude for each day and true purpose for each moment. The kind that flies with the first-hand knowledge that conversion (real, death-to-life transformation) is most certainly possible. *Because it is.* --For you. --For me. --For every inch (every molecule) of creation. Why do I offer such certainty? Why do I stake my life and faith on such a claim?

**3 words—*Christ is Risen.***

Let us pray.