

## Thoughts from the Garden – November 2016

I noticed it with a small gasp of delight one day while waiting for a group of children to arrive at the garden. 'It' was the miraculous chrysalis of a monarch butterfly, and it was hanging underneath the railing of the Honey House porch. It hung from an imperceptible thread atop its acorn shaped hat. We would come to discover the strength of this glue after watching it withstand wind and rain and stormy weather over four weeks time. The chrysalis itself was a shade of green, reminiscent of a slice of wintermint gum. It had a ring of golden gems lined in a circle around the top and five or six more jewels evenly spaced along the bottom. In the sunlight, these markings glowed as if sunlight was shining forth from within. Even Solomon in all his glory possessed no riches such as these.



In addition to watching this chrysalis daily (if not more frequently), we noticed three more nearby. The increase in the monarch butterfly population was likely due to the common milkweed we planted in our native plant nursery almost two years ago. We have only a small patch, but we found more than two handfuls of monarch caterpillars hungrily consuming the oblong leaves of the plants. We watched them too, faithfully every morning, counting and observing the clearly discernible growth from day to day. Around the time of our Autumn Equinox prayer, we noticed one of the caterpillars beneath the same railing as our first chrysalis discovery. He hung upside-down with his body in the shape of a short and chubby, yellow and black striped candy cane. One day later, our legged friend was completely transformed in his process of further transformation. It struck me how similar and distinct this process was from the black swallowtail butterflies we watched a couple of years ago. Each creature evolves so flawlessly with the environment that sustains it.

After days of watching these perfect pockets of possibility, we noticed a great change in the one hanging from the echinacea plant. Instead of the light green color of new spring growth, the chrysalis was black. When we looked closer, we could see the classic orange and black patterns of the adult's wings through the transparent casing. We were tempted to sit and watch as we had intuited that this would be the final stage before the adult butterfly would emerge, but we had no idea how long this stage would take. I did sit, for a while, and would come back between every wheelbarrow full of manure I unloaded as mulch on the flower gardens. I was hoping so strongly to watch as this butterfly emerged. After a morning of interrupted working, I went inside for just a moment before planning to plop myself in front of the chrysalis for a bit. When I came back outside, the brand new butterfly was hanging from the casing of her former abode. Her wings looked damp and folded. I missed it! We spent the next few hours watching as this marvel prepared to take flight. When she finally flew, she took off with no hesitation and headed towards the northwest. I caught but a glance of her radiant wings against the brilliant blue sky before she disappeared from sight.

This monarch experience was prayer, I realize, and it taught me about prayer. Sometimes I enter into prayer with the hope for a specific outcome. I hope for peace or clarity or healing. I hope for a felt experience of God. I sat before this chrysalis with the hope of seeing a butterfly emerge. I missed it, though, and I was frustrated. After hours of watching and waiting, I missed the moment I was hoping to see. I continued to watch though, and sitting before this mystery enabled me to see Mystery everywhere. I didn't see the butterfly emerge, but I witnessed the newest butterfly I have ever seen, and it was amazing. With beauty before me, I simply gazed. I surrendered myself and my little desires to my Desire who first desired me. I wondered, and I gave thanks. Prayer isn't about what I want; nor is it in my control. Many times it is utterly frustrating – I am distracted, anxious, bored or tired, and it doesn't turn out the way I was hoping. Prayer, though, is about showing up, attentive, open and patient. Prayer is sitting before a promise that will manifest itself in ways I can't possibly imagine. And when I do show up, when I do remain open and attentive, every once in a while I catch a glance of radiant wings against a brilliant blue sky.

