

A story for the young Church: "Jesus calls us to be fireflies"

--Based on the writing of Rachel Macy Stafford, "Hands Free Moma"

"What's your favorite insect?" 7 year old Gretchen asked her mother, as they took a walk one evening. "You can't pick a butterfly," she quickly added before her mom had a chance to respond. "Because everyone picks butterflies."

"Hmmm", her mother thought. "I guess mine would have to be a lady bug," she finally answered.

"Mine's a firefly. I love fireflies," Gretchen said wistfully.

The two of them kept walking. And talking. And enjoying their time together – just the two of them. And then Gretchen asked, "Am I okay, mom? I mean am I really fine?," as she kind of looked down at herself. "Because sometimes I feel different. And sometimes people treat me different. Because sometimes, I'm the last to be chosen for a team, or no one wants to sit with me at lunch, or I'm not invited to a party like everyone else."

Gretchen's mom immediately stopped walking and looked at her daughter's face. Without saying what she meant – her mom knew what she meant -- that sometimes Gretchen did not always feel included by her classmates.

Gretchen's mom bent down and spoke from a painful memory tucked away since second grade, "When I was your age," she said, "I felt different, too. At times I felt uncomfortable, self-conscious, and awkward. One time a boy said really cruel things about the way I looked. He said I didn't belong. His words hurt me for a long, long time," her mother admitted.

As Gretchen looked at her mom, somewhat sadly, her previous words echoed in her mom's ears and heart, "Everyone picks butterflies," she had pointed out just a moment ago – certainly Gretchen doesn't think of herself as a butterfly.

Her mom placed her hands on Gretchen's sturdy little shoulders as if somehow this could make her feel the words about to be spoken to her. "I want you to know something, Gretchen. You can always talk to me when you feel different or uncomfortable. I will never laugh. I will never judge you or tell you it's no big deal. I will never brush away your feelings because I do understand. I remember how it hurts. And sometimes you just need someone to understand that hurt."

"I love the firefly" Gretchen had said a moment ago. And then her mom realized she could say something for her daughter to hold on to.

"You mentioned that you love the firefly." Her mom reminded her. "Well, I think you are a lot like a firefly. You know why."

The worry on Gretchen's face lifted. She looked at her mom hopefully and said: "why momma?"

"Because you shine from within," her mom said – touching a finger to Gretchen's heart. "Not everyone sees it – but I do. I see it. And my job is to protect that light. So when people say mean comments that squelch that light, I want you to tell me. I will protect your light by listening and loving you, my brave, courageous, and unique firefly."

Gretchen step forward and wrapped her arms around her mom's neck. She said nothing. Not one word. Maybe it was because she was on the verge of tears. Maybe it was because silent comfort was all she needed at the moment. Her mom could not be sure, but what she was sure of – was the story was not over yet.

For as the weeks passed, Gretchen's mom has not been able to stop thinking of the firefly talk and the timing of the message. School can be hard for some kids – especially the fireflies – those who shine from within. The butterflies are always noticed – so brilliant, so colorful. Their talents so obvious. But it is easy to forget about the fireflies. Their triumphs are quiet and unsuspecting. Their gifts might even go completely unnoticed.

A firefly might be a seat saver on the bus so someone doesn't have to go the intimidating back seat.

A firefly might be a songwriter who pens music in his nightly dreams and hums away his days.

A firefly might be an artist that creates pictures you can feel with your soul.

A firefly might save her money for years just waiting for her heart to tell her, "that's the one who needs your help."

A firefly might stay up past bedtime calculating numbers beneath the covers because she was born a mathematician.

A firefly might be the computer wiz who jumps at the chance to help teachers with their computer woes.

A firefly might get lost in a cloud of flour, delighting in baking things – or just making a mess.

A firefly might be a horseback rider finding peace in the company of animals and nature.

A firefly might devour a 357 page book in one sitting.

A firefly might have eyes for the lonely, looking for someone who wonders if she's invisible.

A firefly might stick up for the lost, the rejected, the alone and lonely.

A firefly might be the lost, the rejected, the alone and lonely – just waiting for someone to notice his light among all the bright fluttering wings of the butterflies.

Maybe you know a firefly. Maybe you love a firefly.

If you do, please don't wait. Don't wait for someone to hand him an award or give her a certificate to make their talents and gifts "official". That day may never come. So say it now. Say this:

I see your light.

I see it when you pick up your guitar.

I see it when you make brushstrokes of yellow, green, and gold.

I see it when you sing with your eyes closed.

I see it when you laugh with your mouth wide open.

I see it when you stand along the water's edge dreaming of your future.

I see your light, my brave and courageous, and unique firefly.

You shine from within.

So keep creating.

Keep dreaming.

Keep adding, and subtracting, and multiplying.

Keep making your magic.

And just wait. Someday the world is going to see what those who love you see. And your light will be so beautiful, so brilliant, so bright – that the world is going to stop and wonder where such a light comes from.

And you and I will both know that light, well, it's been there all along.

Because you are a firefly.

You shine from within.

And your mother, and father, and grandparents, and all those who love you – are there to protect that light, you brave and courageous and unique firefly.

Yes, I think Jesus teaches us today – he wants us all to be fireflies.

[Hand out papers – take home, color them, put your name on them, bring them back]

Let's sing: this little light of mine.