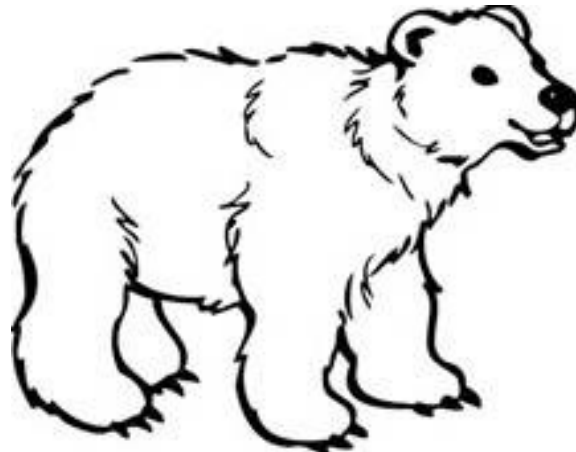


The Ballad of Simon's Hope

A Lenten Reflection on Hope for Children



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Dedicated to all the children of Trinity Lutheran Church, Milledgeville, IL

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Dedicated to all children of First Lutheran Church, Monmouth, IL

Lent 2020

Dear Parents,

Throughout the time of Lent, I will be sharing a children's book I wrote during my story time with the day care students on Thursday. My story, written in 2014, is loosely based on the book, "Hope for the Flowers" by Trina Paulus, published in 1972.

The original story is about a caterpillar and its journey to becoming a butterfly. I have modified this story to be about my friend Simon the Bear and five caterpillar friends, including Catty the Caterpillar. Throughout these weeks, Simon the Bear and Catty the Caterpillar will be with me to help tell this story. At the end of the story, Catty the Caterpillar will have a surprise for the students as she becomes Easter the Butterfly.

The purpose of the story is to tell about hope. Sometimes we do not know how to talk about hope with our kids, especially when we are going through tough or uncertain times. Feel free to sit with a box of crayons and color the pages with your child, read the story again and again. And do not be afraid to talk about hope, and how it gets you through the many situations we deal with.

Each week from now until Easter, I will bring a new chapter of the story to story time along with copies to send home with the students. I have really enjoyed getting to visit with the students in our day care. They really seem to enjoy our once a week story time.

I invite you and your family to join our church this season of Lent. We have Wednesday evening chapel worship at 5:30 PM, a light supper at 6:00 PM and a family Bible study at 6:30 PM. Every Sunday, we have worship at 8:15 AM and 10:00 AM. On Easter Sunday, we have a pot-luck breakfast at 9:15 AM and one worship service at 10:00 AM.

For more information about our congregation, you can follow us on Facebook at First Lutheran Monmouth (@FLCmonmouth.org)

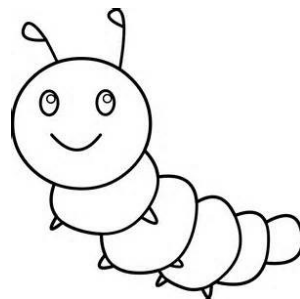
Chapter 1

Simon the Bear had five caterpillar friends: Catty, Red, Leaf, Rainbow and Bud. Simon and his friends lived in the woods under a large maple tree. The tree had many branches, including one really large branch that was bent down toward the ground.

In the morning, as the sunlight dawned through the many trees of the forest, Simon and his friends would wake up and begin their day. After breakfast the caterpillars would climb off their branch onto Simon and they would begin their day's adventure.

Simon and the caterpillars liked to play games. They played tag, hide and seek, red-rover and so many other games.

If you came into the woods where Simon and his five friends were playing, you would hear a lot of laughter. You would see Simon and his five friends running all around the trees.



It is a funny sight to see a bear playing games with caterpillars. Simon is so much bigger than them. But he was such a good friend and they just enjoyed spending time together.

One night, after Simon carried his friends home after a long day of playing, Catty complained about not feeling very well.

Catty said, "Simon, I don't feel very well."

Simon said, "Do you have a tummy ache?"

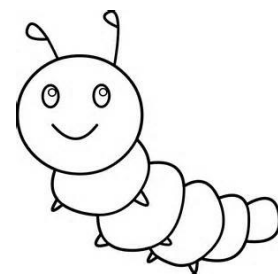
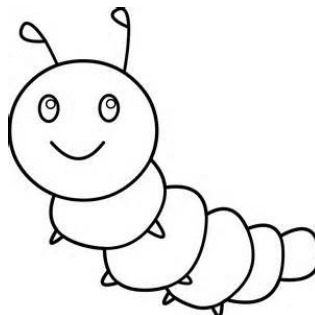
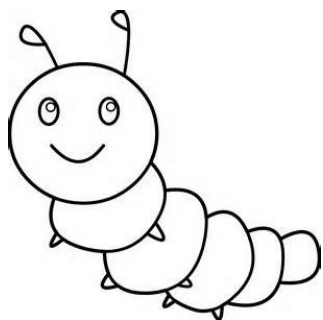
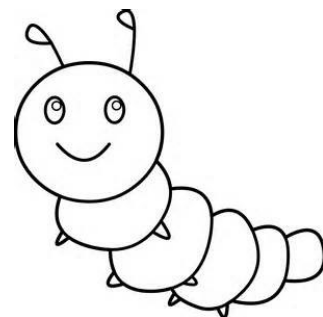
Catty said, "No."

Simon asked, "Do your feet hurt from all our playing today?"

Catty said, "No."

Simon said, "How do you not feel very well?"

Catty said, "I don't know, I have never felt this way before."



Simon said, "I have hope that you will feel better really soon."

The other friends were worried about Catty. They didn't know why she felt so bad either.

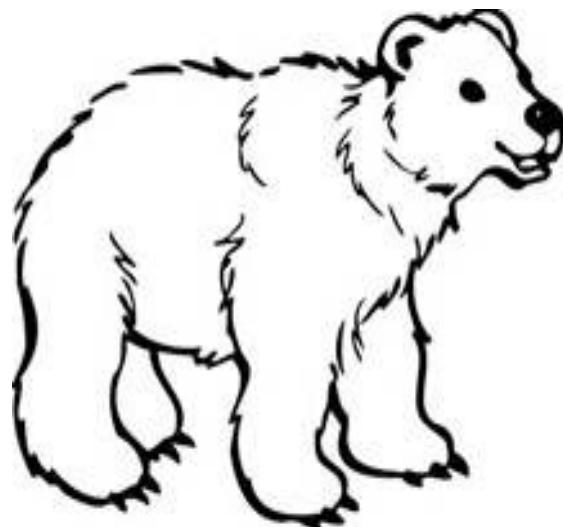
That night, it rained really, really hard. When Simon and his friends woke up, they couldn't find Catty. Where she had gone to sleep there was now something strange.

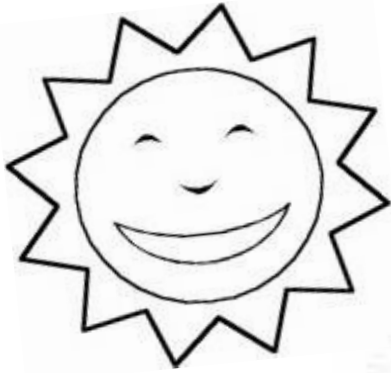
The four caterpillars were very worried and wondered if the rain did something to their friend Catty.

Simon said, "No, no, friends. The rain did not do this."

But they were still scared.

Simon said, "Friends, this is a cocoon. Catty is going to be fine. This is why she wasn't feeling well. Have hope! Something new is coming."





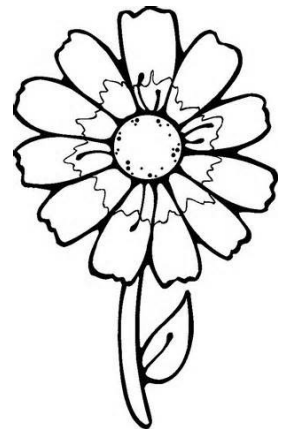
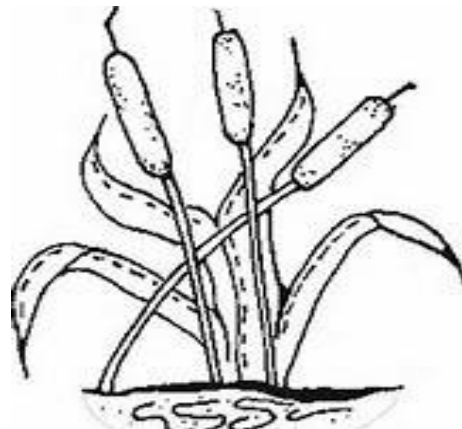
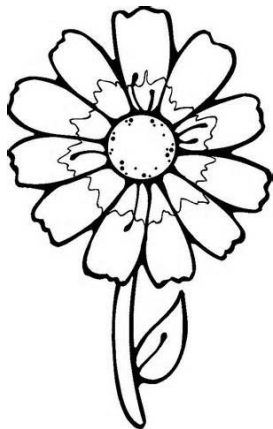
Chapter 2

Simon the Bear has five caterpillar friends: Catty, Red, Leaf, Rainbow and Bud. But something happened last night to Catty. Simon said, "She became a cocoon. Have hope, something new is happening."

The four friends were still worried about Catty. Simon suggested they go on a picnic. So they made a basket and walked to the meadow and had a great picnic.

Simon brought berries and honey and some nuts he collected. The caterpillars brought leaves and leaves and leaves and leaves and a blade of grass for dessert.

It was such an amazing sight to see. Simon, such a large bear, and these four caterpillars sitting out in the beautiful meadow enjoying a picnic. The wind gently blew through the flowers and the cattails and the one oak tree in the middle of the meadow gave such a nice shade for the friends as they enjoyed their picnic treats.



As the sun began to set, Simon carried his friends back home into the woods where they lived. The caterpillars climbed off of Simon's back onto their branch and there was the mysterious cocoon that Catty became.

Then Red, who had one red foot, which is why he was called Red, complained that he wasn't feeling very well.

Red said, "I don't feel very well."

Simon asked, "Does your tummy hurt?"

Red said, "No."

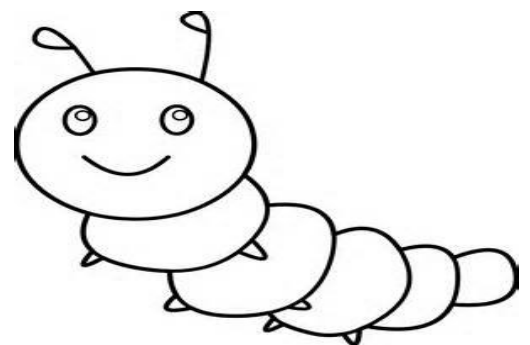
Simon asked, "Do your feet hurt from playing in the meadow today?"

Red said, "No."

Simon asked, "How do you not feel very well?"

Red said, "I don't know. I have never felt this way before."

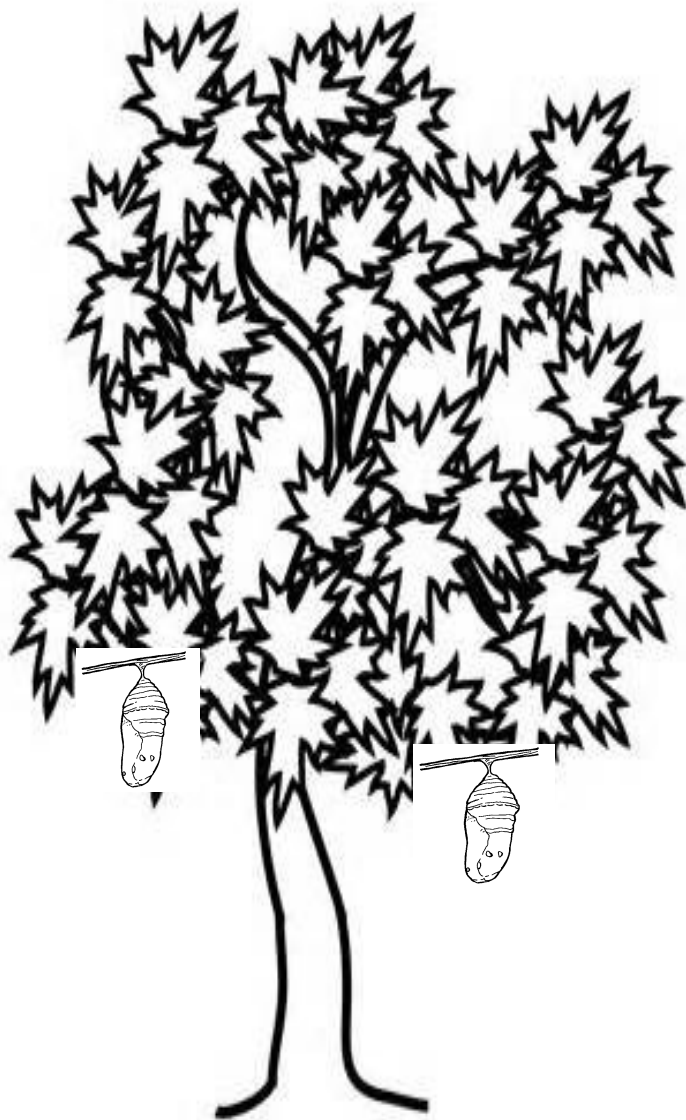
Simon said, "I have hope you will feel better really soon."

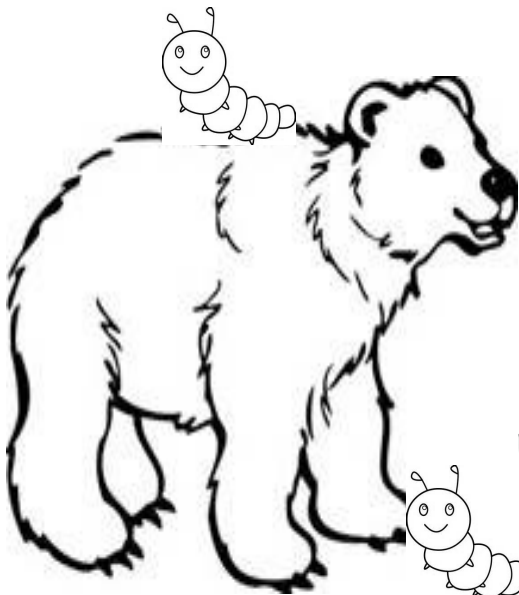
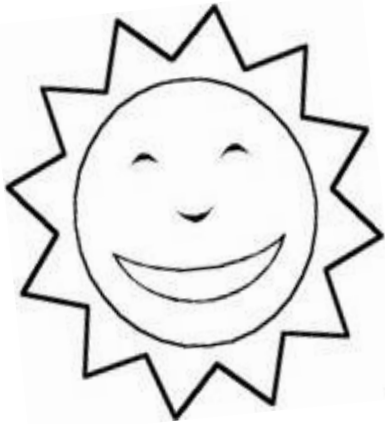


That night a deep fog fell over the woods. And when the friends woke up, they could not find Red. In fact, where he was sleeping was now a new mysterious cocoon.

The three remaining caterpillar friends were very worried and they were afraid the deep fog had done something to Red.

Simon said, "Have hope, my friends. Something new is happening!"





Chapter 3

Simon the Bear has five caterpillar friends: Catty, Red, Leaf, Rainbow and Bud. Leaf, Rainbow and Bud were really worried because their friends Catty and Red had become something mysterious Simon called cocoons.

Simon said, "My friends, something new is happening. You need to have hope."

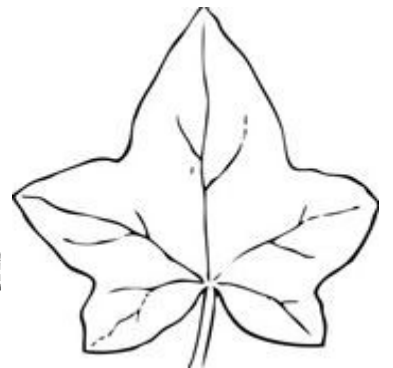
Leaf asked, "You keep telling us to have hope. But what is hope?"

Simon said, "Hope is trusting that something new is happening, even when you can't always see what that something new is going to be."

Leaf asked, "So, when I hope for leaves for lunch and then I get leaves for lunch, that is hope?"

Simon said, "Well sort of. But you know you will eat lunch and it's fairly safe to say you will eat leaves for lunch."

Leaf said, "Yeah, I love leaves for lunch. I could eat leaves for lunch every day!"



Simon laughed, "You do eat leaves for lunch every day!"

Leaf asked, "So what is the hope you tell us to have?"

Simon said, "Well, look at the cocoons that Catty and Red became. I said, 'Have hope, something new is happening.' And, maybe you don't know what is going to happen, but I trust something new is happening."

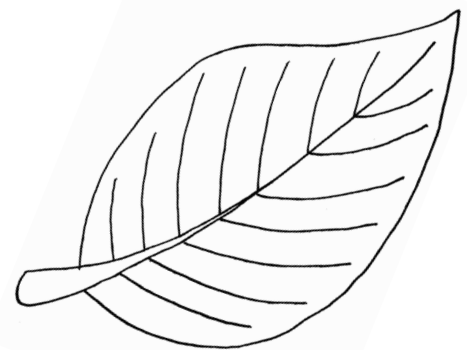
Leaf asked, "Is hope always this hard to trust?"

Simon answered, "Sometimes it is but this hope never fails."

Leaf asked, "How do you know?"

Simon answered, "That is the thing. I don't know, I just hope!"

After they talked, Simon suggested they go swimming. And the three caterpillars climbed on to Simon's back and he walked down to the creek. It was such a sight to see a bear splashing in the deep creek with his three friends.



As the sun was setting, Simon carried his friends home to the woods. They climbed off Simon's back onto the branch where Catty and Red both hung in their mysterious cocoons. Leaf then started to complain that he didn't feel very well.

Leaf said, "I don't feel very well."

Simon asked, "Do you think it is how Catty or Red felt?"

Leaf said, "I hope so. Is that right?" Simon nodded.

That night, the wind blew really hard. It shook the tree and the branch the caterpillars slept on. When they woke up, the caterpillar friends could not find Leaf, but instead found in his place another cocoon. The two caterpillars were very worried, and afraid the strong wind did something to their friend.

Simon said, "Have hope my friends, something new is happening."





Chapter 4

Simon the Bear has five caterpillar friends: Catty, Red, Leaf, Rainbow and Bud. Rainbow and Bud are really worried, though, because Catty, Red and Leaf have all become something mysterious Simon calls cocoons.

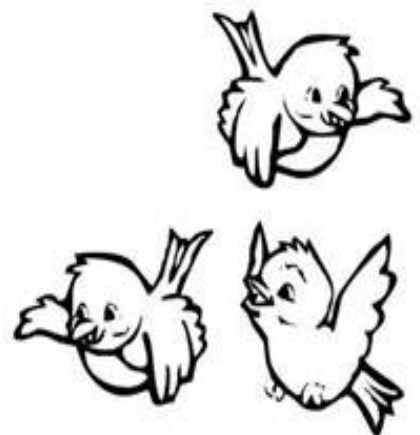
Last night, there was a great wind when Leaf became a cocoon. Rainbow and Bud were worried and afraid the strong winds had done something to Leaf.

Simon said, "Have hope, my friends, something new is happening!"

Simon took Rainbow and Bud on a hike through the woods. They encountered lots of other friends from the woods. They met birds and squirrels and chipmunks and even the great big Papa Deer joined them for a while on their hike.

While they walked, Rainbow asked Simon, "How long do we have to wait until we know what we hope for has happened?"

Simon said, "That is a good question, Rainbow. It isn't always about how long. We simply have hope."



Rainbow said, "But I don't like waiting for the things I want."

Simon answered him, "I don't always like waiting either. But hope does not end, hope continues forever. We must always have hope."

Simon and the caterpillars walked for a very long time. They went out of the forest and across the meadow. There at the edge of the meadow, they sat down. Clouds moved over head and a gentle rain began.

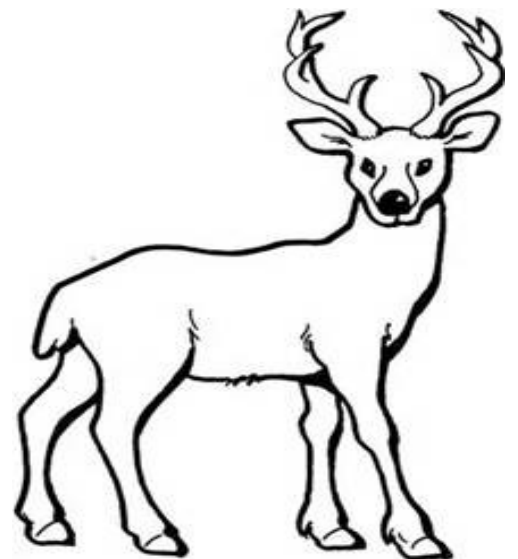
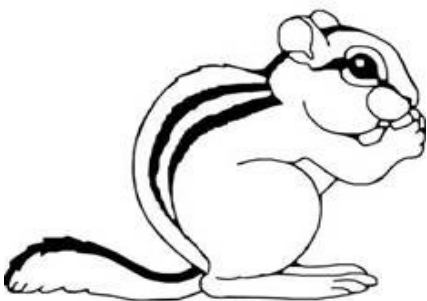
Rainbow and Bud sat underneath Simon and were kept dry by Simon's fur. Then as the rain ended, and the sun came out, a bright rainbow appeared in the sky.

Simon asked his friends, "Do you see the rainbow in the sky?"

They both answered him, "Yes."

Simon said, "When the rains come, we don't always know when it will end, but we know the rain will end."

Rainbow said, "Yeah, but sometimes it rains so much it makes large puddles!"



Simon said, "And sometimes it makes the rivers flood. But the rain always ends."

Rainbow then said, "And then we see the rainbow!"

Simon said, "Yes. God put the rainbow in the sky to help us remember his promise that something new is always happening."

The caterpillars climbed onto Simon and Simon walked back to their home, to the branch where the cocoons of Catty, Red and Leaf were hanging.

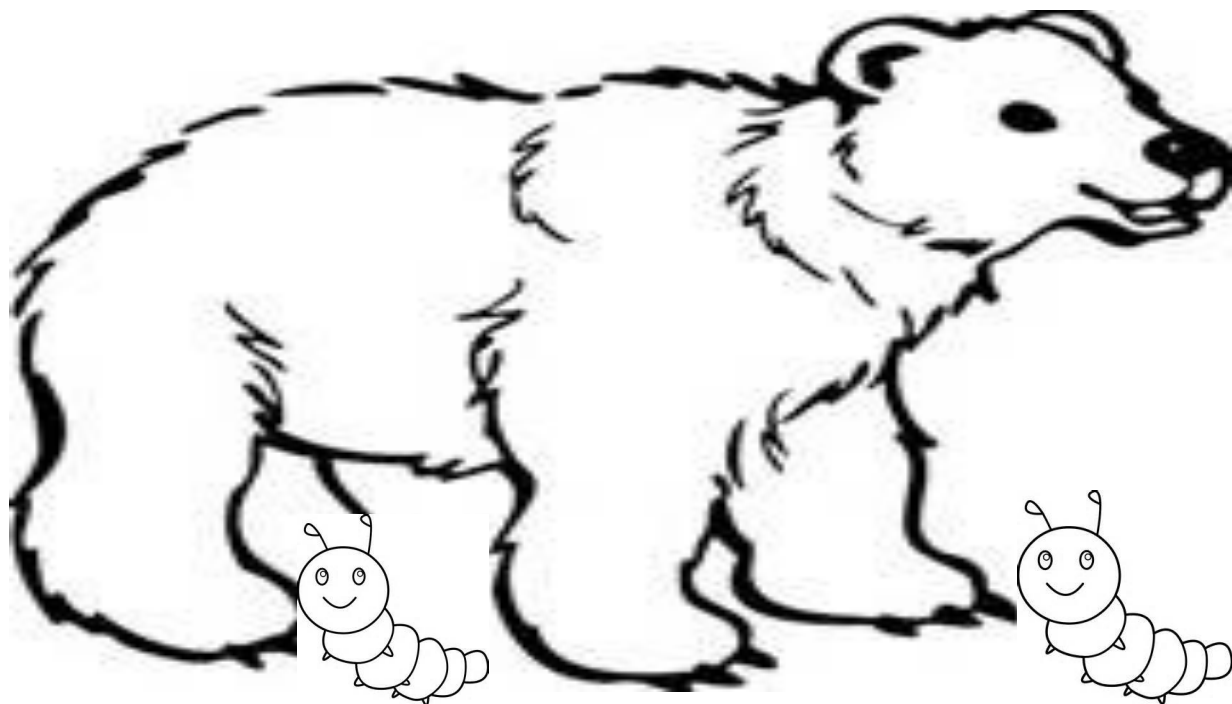
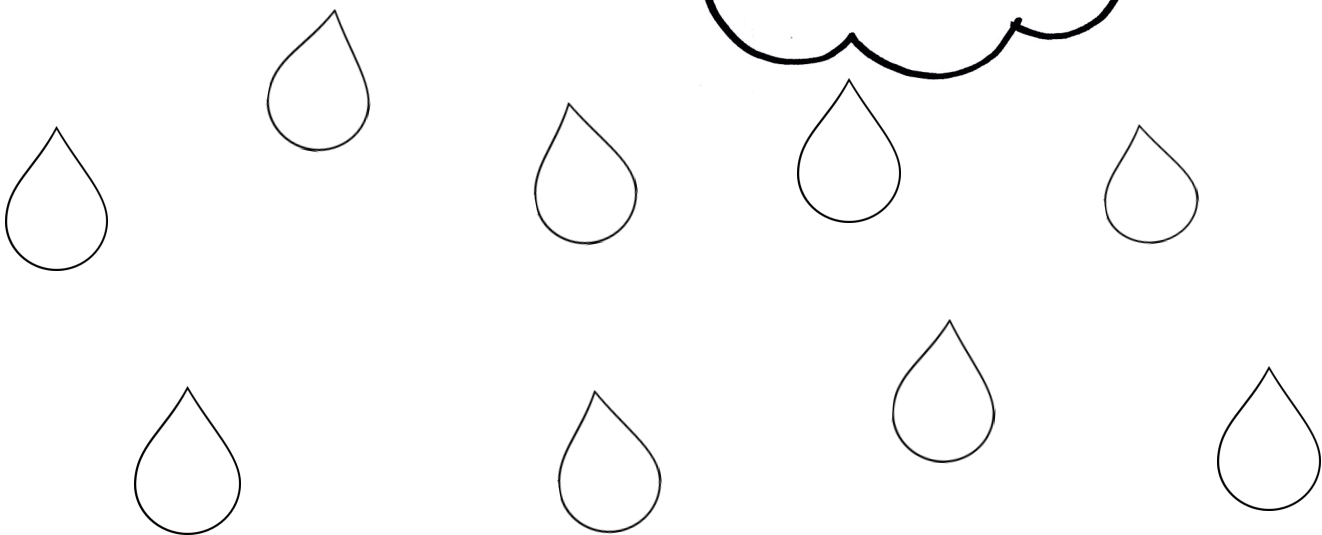
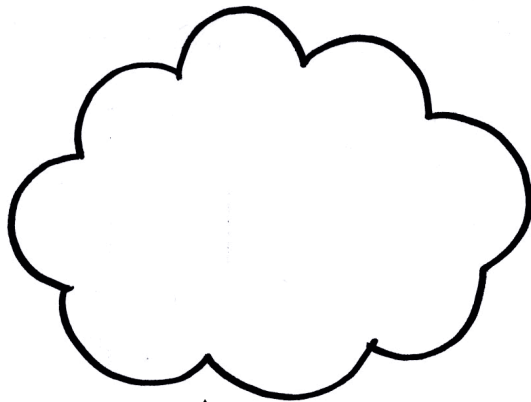
As they prepared for the night, Rainbow said to Simon, "Simon, I don't feel so well."

Simon asked, "Does your tummy not feel well?"

Rainbow answered, "No. I think this must be how my friends felt. I hope something new is happening to me."

Simon said, "I have great hope it is."





Chapter 5

Simon the Bear and Bud the Caterpillar woke up to see their friend Rainbow had become a mysterious cocoon just like their friends Catty, Red, and Leaf.

Bud asked, "Simon, do you think I will become a cocoon like my friends?"

Simon said, "I hope so."

Bud said, "But I don't know what will happen to me."

Simon said, "Bud, we hope precisely because we don't know. We simply trust that God is doing something new."

Bud said, "Even though we can't see it?"

Simon said, "Especially because we can't see it. We have hope because our faith tells us God is doing something new, even when we can't see it."

Simon knew his friend was really worried. And Simon wanted to help him understand more about the hope that something new was indeed happening.



Simon said, "Bud, climb on. Let's go for an adventure."

So Bud climbed onto Simon's back, and Simon began walking through the woods along the familiar path in the meadow. There in the middle of the meadow stood a single oak tree. Simon walked up to the tree, and said, "Hold on tight!"

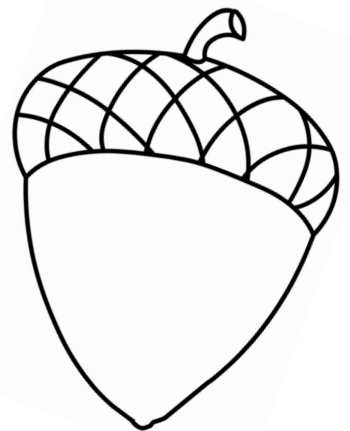
Simon began climbing the tree. He grabbed branch after branch after branch and just when Bud thought there were no more branches to grab onto, Simon found one last branch that could still hold him. Simon reached out and grabbed it and pulled them up onto the highest branch in that oak tree.

Simon said, "You know what is so amazing about this tree?"

Bud answered, "What is so amazing about this tree?"

Simon said, "This tree started as something really, really small. It began as an acorn."

"An acorn!" Bud said confused. "But I thought squirrels and chipmunks ate acorns."



Simon said, "Yes, they do. But they don't eat all of them. And this oak tree began when a single acorn fell here and did not get eaten by a squirrel or a chipmunk. And today, it is so large that I, a large bear, can climb so far up that we can see the whole meadow, the entire forest and the vast valley surrounding us from up here on top."

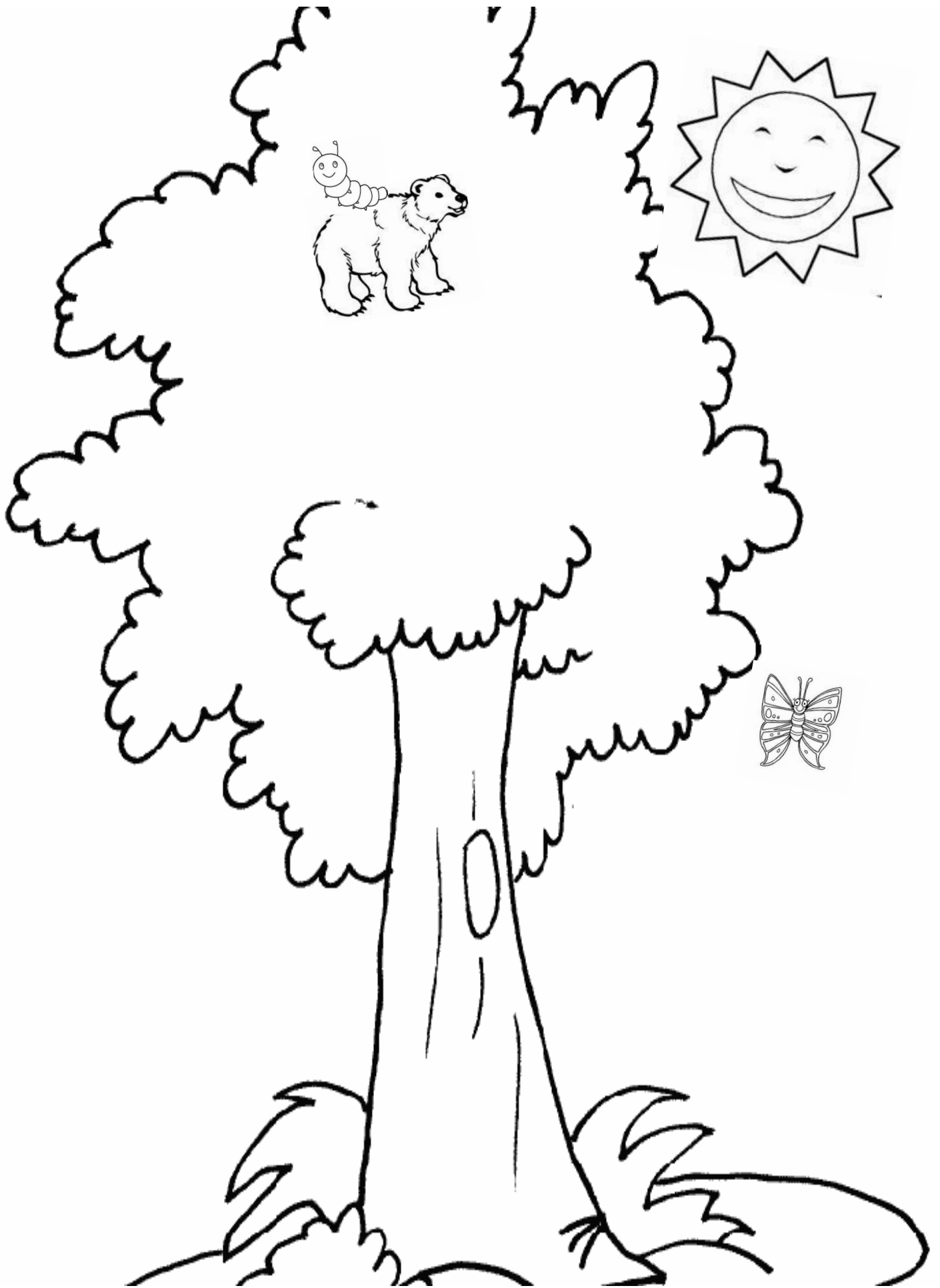
As they watched the sun begin to set, a butterfly flew up and landed on a leaf not far from Simon and Bud.

Simon said, "Bud, it is time we get back to our home."

Simon the Bear, with Bud the Caterpillar on his back, started climbing down the big oak tree in the center of the meadow. They walked across to the woods and back to their home where the branch hung with the cocoons for Catty, Red, Leaf and Rainbow.

As Bud walked onto the branch, he said, "Simon, I don't feel very well, and I hope it is because something new is happening to me."





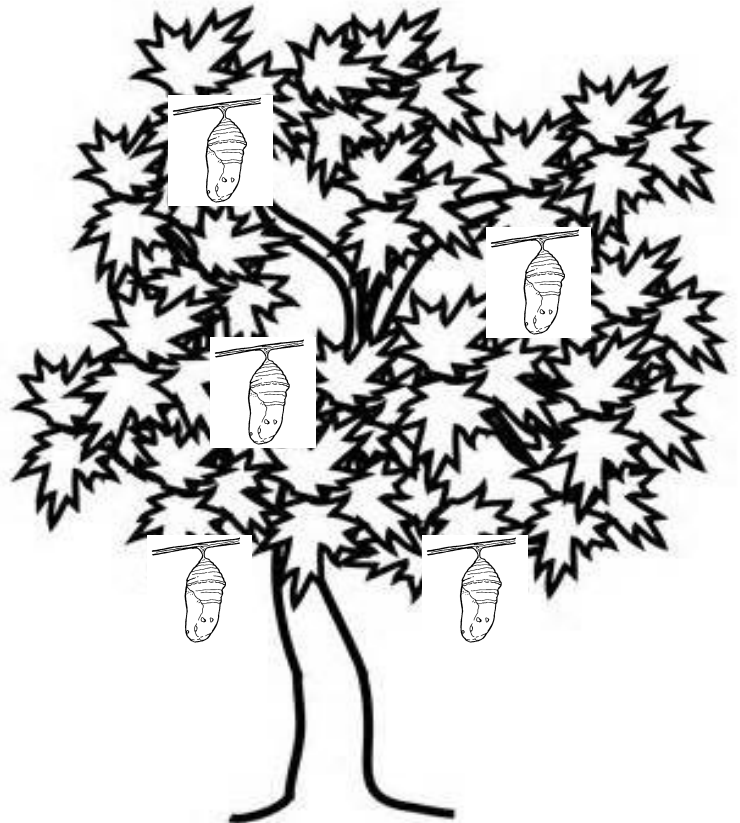
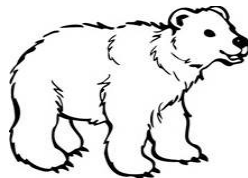
Chapter 6

Simon the Bear had five caterpillar friends, Catty, Red, Leaf, Rainbow and Bud. Today, as he woke up from his long night sleep, Simon found his friend Bud had also become a mysterious cocoon just like Catty, Red, Leaf and Rainbow had become.

Simon whispered to his friends, "Don't give up hope!" Something new is happening!"

Simon watched and waited. He waited and watched.

Sometimes he would go and get some nuts and berries to eat. Sometimes he would just sit for hours watching the mysterious cocoons. He wondered what was happening inside them, and wished there was a way for him to peek inside.



But Simon knew all he could do was wait and wait and hope and hope that something new was really happening.

Then one morning, just as Simon was getting ready to go for a walk, he heard a sound. Simon stopped in his tracks and quietly moved closer to see what was happening.

One of the cocoons was starting to open up. It was Catty's cocoon. The brown paper-like protective layers of the cocoon started falling away. Catty was not the same!

Bright colorful wings stretched out! Catty was a butterfly!

Simon laughed and said, "Oh my friend, Catty! Something amazingly new has really happened! You are a beautiful butterfly!"

Catty stretched her wings and said, "Something new has indeed happened! And, to mark this new thing, I will now be called Easter!"

Simon laughed and rolled and clapped his paws.

Slowly, the next cocoon began to open! And the next one, and the next one, and the last one of the row too. As each mysterious cocoon opened, there were more bright and colorful wings stretching for the first time.

Simon was overwhelmed with joy. He had hoped that something new was happening. And what an amazing sight to see the birth of five new butterflies.

Simon said, "Red, Leaf, Rainbow and Bud! You are all so beautiful!"

Red answered, "I am now called Faith!"

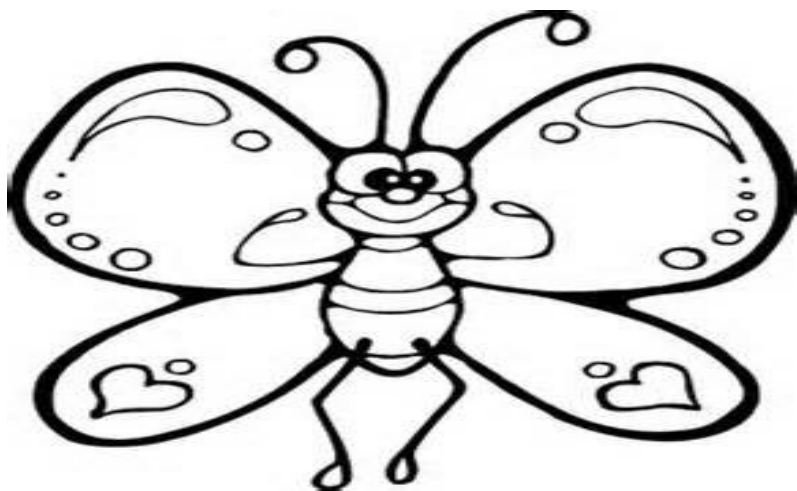
Leaf answered, "I am now called Joy!"

Rainbow answered, "I am now called Peace!"

Bud answered, "You can still call me Bud!"

Easter was the first to be brave and try out her new wings. She caught the wind just right and began to soar high. Faith, Joy, Peace and Bud all followed. Simon just laughed as he ran along the path below. It was an amazing sight, watching a bear rejoicing at the sight of his five caterpillar, well, now butterfly friends fly across the sky.

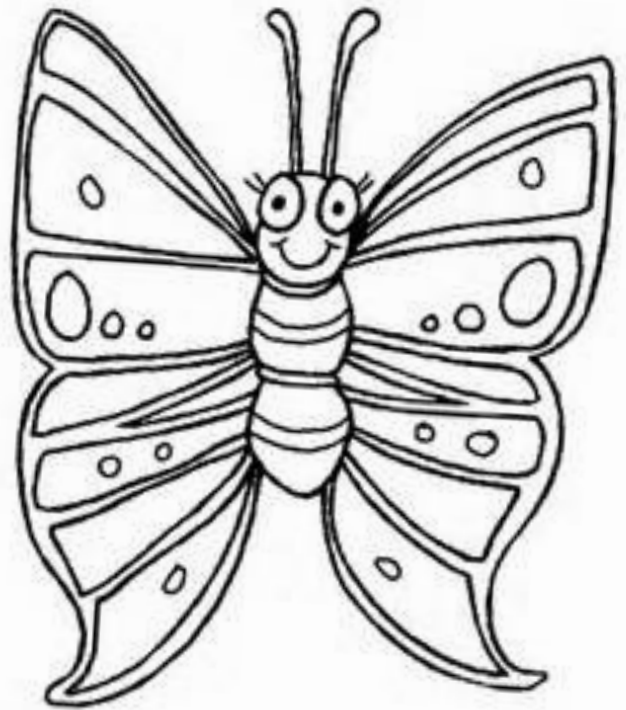
Hope had indeed won!
Something new had really happened.



Easter



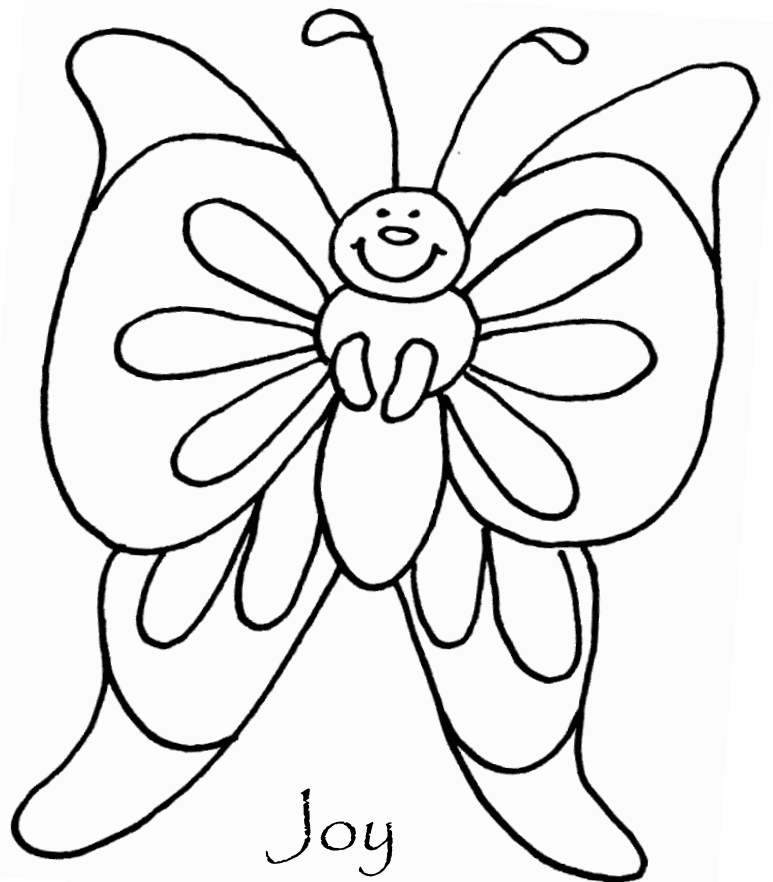
Peace



Bud



Faith



Joy