

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – June 17, 2018 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: Ezekiel 17:22-24

Thus says the Lord GOD: I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar, from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot, and plant it on a high and lofty mountain; on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it. It shall put forth branches and bear fruit, and become a majestic cedar. Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it, every winged thing in the shade of its boughs. And all the trees of the field shall know that I, the LORD, bring low the high tree, lift high the lowly tree, wither up the green tree, and make the withered tree bloom. As I, the LORD, have spoken, so will I do.

Psalm: Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

R. (cf. 2a) **Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.**

It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praise to your name, Most High,
To proclaim your kindness at dawn
and your faithfulness throughout the night.

The just one shall flourish like the palm tree,
like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.
They that are planted in the house of the LORD
shall flourish in the courts of our God.

They shall bear fruit even in old age;
vigorous and sturdy shall they be,
Declaring how just is the LORD,
my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Brothers and sisters: We are always courageous, although we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yet we are courageous, and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord. Therefore, we aspire to please him, whether we are at home or away. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

Gospel: Mark 4:26-34

Jesus said to the crowds: "This is how it is with the kingdom of God; it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and would sleep and rise night and day and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come."

He said, "To what shall we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable can we use for it? It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth. But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade." With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it. Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.

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PARISH MISSION PRAYER 2018

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks and praise for the blessings You have bestowed on us and on our Good Shepherd parish. We ask that You send Your Holy Spirit upon us to prepare our hearts and minds for the upcoming Parish Mission. May we be a warm, welcoming community and loving witness to those returning home and to those visiting. We ask Your blessings upon Fr. Albert MacPherson as he prepares to deliver Your message of healing and to lead us in Your Word. May all who attend be filled with Your Holy Spirit that they may go into the community sharing Your love, Your message, and Your joy with their neighbors. We ask this through Your Son, Our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The farmer sows seeds in the earth and then waits. He will use a scythe (“blade”) to reap the crop when it is ready. Then he and his neighbors with him will gather it into piles, or “pooks” as they were called in England, so that the farmer by counting pooks could know how much grain to expect from his harvest. Next, threshing, separating the husks and straw from the grain, followed in older cultures by winnowing, which detached the heavier grain from the lighter chaff. This is the process described to me by an Irish friend as we drove around his country. He said this older method promoted community among farmers as they helped one another. The invention in America of the combine in the early 19th century made it possible for each farmer to reap, thresh and winnow all alone, using the combine harvester. Despite all their efficiency, giant machine-driven harvesting makes it possible to forget the mystery of growth and human effort, as well as community.

For his part, Jesus was much more interested in persons and the miracle of the yield. The first parable in the Gospel for Sunday shows us that. A farmer scatters seeds on the land and waits. His ordinary life then continues. He would *sleep and rise night and day, and through it all the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how. Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.* Jesus gives quiet admiration to this act of life. Seeds begin as tiny morsels and become, by the time the farmer can discern, sprouts. Then they burgeon into a whole field of crops, finally ready for harvest. The farmer has waited modestly for the mysterious process to take place. Jesus compares this everyday miracle to the Kingdom of God. The Catholic Encyclopedia says the Kingdom of God is “a tone of mind (Luke 17:20-21),” that “stands for an influence which must permeate men's minds if they would be one with [Jesus] and attain to his ideals” (Catholic Encyclopedia, p. 646, “The Kingdom of God”). The seeds of love are planted in human souls and grow up unobtrusively, easy to miss, as each person sleeps and wakes.

In the second parable the humility of the seed is apparent. Jesus says that a mustard seed is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. In fact, it was not, so I am told. Smaller still are the petunia, the begonia and orchid seeds. But the tiny mustard seed (the size of a pinhead) unassumingly grows to be a great shrub or even a tree, one that is taller than a man's head! The white mustard species grew to ten or twelve feet with a stem the size of a man's arm! It was well known in Israel. How does this apply to the Kingdom of God? Well, we are small. The movements of the Spirit in us are so modest as to be nearly disregarded. Yet if we are patient, if we watch for growth within us, in winter and in spring rain, the Spirit gradually will surge up and will give us the yield of much fruit. It is a miracle of growth in plants and trees, but even more in the goodness and grace that is God's kingdom in us.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. The tender shoot becomes a majestic cedar. In the Gospels, Jesus referred to the “least” becoming the “greatest” numerous times. How is Jesus' own life an example of this? Can you think of others who followed or now follow this example?
2. Is your faith constant even when the spiritual weather patterns in your life are not? Paul said, “We are always courageous.” Is that true? Are you? Always? What helps when you are not?
3. What is the farmer's job in both these parables? What is God's job? Could you ask yourself the same two questions about your ministry, ... your job and God's job? Can you trust God to do God's job?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

O God, strength of those who hope in you, graciously hear our pleas, and, since without you mortal frailty can do nothing, grant us always the help of your grace, that in following your commands we may please you by our resolve and our deeds. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen