

## The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 13, 2021

### Hymn 533 How wondrous and great thy works

How wondrous and great thy works, God of praise!  
How just, King of saints, and true are thy ways!  
O who shall not fear thee, and honor thy Name?  
Thou only art holy, thou only supreme.

To nations of earth thy light shall be shown;  
their worship and vows shall come to thy throne:  
thy truth and thy judgments shall spread all abroad,  
till earth's every people confess thee their God.

### The Collect of the Day

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

### 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson – Ezekiel 17:22-24

Thus says the Lord God: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out. I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind. All the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken; I will accomplish it.

### Psalm 92

It is good to give thanks to the Lord\* To sing praises to your name, O Most High;

To declare your steadfast love in the morning\* And your faithfulness by night,

To the music of the lute and the harp\* To the melody of the lyre.

How great are your works, O Lord\* Your thoughts are very deep!

Though the wicked sprout like grass and evildoers flourish\* They are doomed to destruction forever,

For your enemies, O Lord shall perish\* All evildoers shall be scattered.

But the righteous flourish like the palm tree\* And grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

In old age they still produce fruit\* They are always green and full of sap,

For the Lord is upright; the Lord is my rock\* And there is no unrighteousness in the Lord.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson -- 2 Corinthians 5:1-17**

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident; even though 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. Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.

We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. For if we are beside

ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

### **Hymn 530 -- Spread O spread thy mighty word**

Spread, O spread, thou mighty word, spread the kingdom of the Lord,  
That to earth's remotest bound all may heed the joyful sound

Word of how the Spirit came bringing peace in Jesus' name;  
How his never-failing love guides us on to heaven above.

Word of life, most pure and strong, word for which the nations long,  
Spread abroad, until from night all the world awakes to light.

### **The Holy Gospel according to Mark - Chapter 4:26-34**

He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."

He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

### **The Seeds of Love**

The scripture readings today are full of the wonderful and arresting imagery of plants and trees and growth. And no matter what we do or do not understand or agree with in our conversations about God, in one area we can all easily and happily concur. When we talk about the wonders God has done on Earth, the growth and flourishing of plant life is convincing evidence that we are living in the midst of miracles. The further scientists progress in deducing about how the natural world evolved and how things work to survive and reproduce, the greater our awe and wonder at the beauty, variety and mystery of it all. As Juliet observes, "That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet." And would move us as deeply.

When Jesus speaks to his people, and by extension, to us, he takes this wonder and appreciation into account, and uses image upon image of plants to teach about God. The stories he tells are full of these images for two reasons: One is that the Hebrew Scriptures are full of them already and Jesus is a living repository of God's holy Word. We like to say Jesus is the Word of God. Like the most knowledgeable and wise professor you can imagine, Jesus communicates from an utterly complete and instantaneously cross-referenceable database of all there is to know. He makes the Library of Congress look like a Bookmobile. This is why we find snippets of, and references to Holy Scripture -- especially from the Psalms -- throughout the collected sayings of Jesus; from the moment he begins to speak in parables, to his dying words on the cross.

The other reason he uses these images from the realm of Nature is that they work on us even and ever more strongly than is possible for human examples and experiences. When there is a human story, we will always be prone to discuss, second-guess, even argue about what the subject should have done, or whether we ourselves would have behaved differently (ie: better) in the same circumstances. But when we are presented with imagery from nature, it is much more difficult to deny or explain away as an outlier, and thus much easier to accept.

We know that crops improve with sufficient water. The plants we eat these days are only grown by wringing every possible drop of water from our parched earth. So when Psalm 84 says, "As they walk through the bitter valley, it turns into a place of springs and the rain showers them with blessings," we cannot be confused about the meaning: God's love nourishes us and allows us to live, whoever and wherever we are. "Happy indeed are the ones whose delight is the law of the Lord, they are like trees planted

beside flowing waters, that yield their fruit in due season and whose leaves shall never fade. Not so are the wicked, not so! For they, like dry and winnowed chaff shall be driven away by the wind.”

Or today’s psalm which tells us: “The just will flourish like the palm tree and grow like a Lebanon cedar. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God, still bearing fruit when they are old, still full of sap, still green!” What we used to call the three V’s, Vim, Vigor and Vitality; and who can argue with that? Even as our bodies start to weaken, the spirit of the God’s love grows stronger to make up the difference. For we know the greatest miracle of all is God’s insistence on being in our midst, in bringing the spiritual power of God’s very self into relationship with us here and now in the form of love, so that we will never have to fear death again for long. We are met – well and truly met – halfway between flesh and spirit, like a pilot boat coming out to lead us into harbor, or like the plants that die and rejoin the earth, only to feed the next generation of life.

The saying goes, God will never let you get more than you can handle. But anyone who has ever suffered true tragedy, the untimely loss of a child or other loved one, the experience of war, famine or disease, the horror of addiction knows full well that that statement is, how can I put this delicately... inaccurate. The truth is there is more to life than a person can handle, and the unhandle-able can hit us at any time, when we least expect it. The glory and wonder is that, though I might get more than I can handle, God will never let me have more than we can handle: together. And in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, God’s self and humankind are propelled into permanent and invincible fellowship, permanent we-ship. There is nothing we cannot handle.

So Jesus tells these parables today, taking images from nature to depict phenomena of love. Why are we so fond of one thing over another, like our favorite ice cream, or rose, or vista? There are probably reasons, way back in our childhoods, or because of what our parents either did or didn’t do. The same goes for the things we fear most; most of them are the products of lies we were told or hurts we felt. But why are we so fond of our kids? Biologically speaking, it’s for survival. But beyond that, once they are up and away, it’s a phenomenon. The love is just built in, unless something catastrophic or toxic comes along to drive it out. It is the bliss of our emotional growth, just as a seed contains both the mechanical means of producing a new plant, and also the secret of its beauty.

This is what Jesus is telling us about the Love of God -- the ‘Kingdom’ is how

it often gets translated. There is no explanation, just fact. As Cole Porter wrote, "What is this thing called love; this funny thing called love? Just who can solve its mystery? Why should it make a fool of me?" Jesus is telling us to stop trying to solve the mystery, (stop trying to make flesh out of it is what St. Paul would say) and just become people of spirit; be made fools for love.

Which brings us to the mustard seed parable, one of Jesus' clearest and most inescapable similes, the tiniest grain of love can produce vast results if allowed to grow. See also the butterfly effect, wherein one lepidopteran wingbeat over here in Morro Bay can amplify into a typhoon by the time it gets down to Singapore. Not sure I quite understand that one, but the idea that every heartbeat of love is felt by the universe and ripples infinitely outward rings resoundingly true.

The mustard seed is Jesus himself, whose one life gave inestimable justice to the world if only we would accept it. "The mustard seed, when sown upon the ground is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet it puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." He is evoking Ezekiel's great tree: "On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar. Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind."

Notice Ezekiel says 'every kind' twice, just in case we didn't hear it the first time: every kind of bird, winged creatures of every kind. Surely that makes room for every one of us. Our beginnings and our personal wealth and power are no indication, let alone a measure of our grace and potential for love. The tiniest cone is what you would have to plant if you wanted a California Redwood in your yard. Of course you might have to wait a thousand years – and not cut it down -- for it to have its full effect. And that is so hard to understand, I would just rather believe.

### **Hymn746 -- God the sculptor of the mountains**

God the sculptor of the mountains, God the miller of the sand,  
God the jeweler of the heavens, God the potter of the land:  
You are womb of all creation, we are formless; shape us now.

God the nuisance to the Pharaoh, God the cleaver of the sea,  
God the pillar of the darkness, God the beacon of the free:

You are gate of all deliv'rance, we are sightless; lead us now.

God the unexpected infant, God the calm, determined youth,  
God the table turning prophet, God the resurrected Truth:  
You are present every moment, we are searching; meet us now.

God the dresser of the vineyard, God the planter of the wheat,  
God the reaper of the harvest, God the source of all we eat:  
You are host at every table, we are hungry; feed us now.

### **The Prayers of the People**

O God of heaven and earth, through Jesus Christ you promise to hear us when we pray to you in faith with thanksgiving, and so we pray for one another, for our families and friends. Thank you for all who care for us. Give us grace to serve Christ by serving our neighbours and our community, loving others as he loves us.

Silence

We thank you for the unfailing love you hold out to everyone in Jesus Christ. Comfort and heal those in sorrow, need, sickness or any other trouble, especially Sue, Katherine, Karen, the family and friends of John Severson, are there others...? and all those we hold in our hearts this day. Give them courage and hope in their distress, and bless those who minister to them.

Silence

We remember with gratitude your many gifts to us in creation and the rich heritage of this land. Help us and people everywhere to share with justice and peace the resources of the earth. Give more wisdom, integrity, vision and compassion to those in authority among us and to all leaders of the nations.

Silence

We pray for your Church throughout the world, thanking you for all who serve Christ and his kingdom. By your Spirit strengthen your people for their work and witness in the world. Unite us in your truth and love, that we who confess your name may also reflect your glory.

Silence

We remember with thanksgiving all who have died in Christ, especially John Severson, who died this week, Harleigh Knott who was laid to rest this week, all victims of the Covid pandemic, all victims of gunfire in our land, are there others...? We rejoice at the faithful witness of your saints in every age, praying that we may enter with them into the unending joy of your heavenly kingdom.

### **Hymn 594 -- God of grace and God of glory**

God of grace and God of glory, on thy people pour thy power;  
Crown thine ancient Church's story; bring her bud to glorious flower.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour,  
For the facing of this hour

Lo! the hosts of evil round us scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!  
From the fears that long have bound us free our hearts to faith and praise:  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days,  
For the living of these days.

Cure thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to thy control;  
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss thy kingdom's goal,  
Lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;  
Let the gift of thy salvation be our glory evermore.  
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving thee whom we adore,  
Serving thee whom we adore.