

The Sunday Missive – June 16, 2024 The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Hymn 421 All glory be to God on high

All glory be to God on high, and peace on earth from heaven,
And God's good will unfailingly be to all people given.
We bless, we worship you, we raise for your great glory
Thanks and praise, O God, Almighty Father.

O Lamb of God, Lord Jesus Christ, whom God the Father gave us,
Who for the world was sacrificed up on the cross to save us;
And, as you sit at God's right hand and we for judgement
There must stand, have mercy, Lord, upon us.

You only are the Holy One, who came for our salvation,
And only you are God's true Son, who was before creation.
You, only, Christ, as Lord we own, and with the Spirit,
You alone share in the Father's glory.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyktEJPElcc&t=113s>

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.*

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 tell of your loving-kindness early in the morning* ***Of your faithfulness in the night season;***

On the psaltery, and the lyre* ***To the melody of the harp.***

For you have made me glad by your acts, O Lord* ***I shout for joy because of the works of your hands.***

The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree* ***Shall spread abroad like a cedar of Lebanon.***

Those who are planted in the house of God* ***Shall flourish in the courts of the Lord***

They shall still bear fruit in old age* ***They shall be green and succulent;***

That they may show how upright the Lord is* ***Our rock, in whom there is no fault.***

2 Corinthians 5:6-17

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 746 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 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.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BB7fVXZcSD0>

Mark 4:26-34

Jesus 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.

Seeds of Nature – Proper 6B

Take a good look at this pine cone, I’ll have more to say about it in a little while. 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 agree: 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. Just look at the wild wonders in our Healing Meadow, or the magnificent things going on in the Memorial Garden – thanks be to God, and Sarah DeLong.

When Jesus speaks to his people, and by extension, to us, he takes this into account, and uses image upon image of plants to teach about God. The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed... 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. Makes Google and Wikipedia and Britannica look like the Berenstain Bears. 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 is that images from the realm of Nature 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; it is much easier to accept.

We know that crops improve with sufficient water. So, when Psalm 84 says, "As they walk through the bitter valley, they make it a place of springs; the rain will shower them with blessings," we cannot be confused about the meaning: God's love nourishes us, whoever and wherever we are. Whether our taste runs to 'Edelweiss, Edelweiss, every morning you greet me,' or 'Tiptoe through the tulips,' happy indeed is the one whose delight is the law of the Lord, they are like a tree that is planted beside flowing waters, that yields its fruit in due season and whose leaves shall never fade. Not so are the wicked, not so! For they, like 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. Who can argue with that? And even as our bodies start to fail, the spirit of the God's love grows stronger to make up the difference. For we know the greatest miracle of all Creation 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 Christ Jesus, 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 unhandleable can hit us at any time, when we least expect it, like Candid Camera. The glory and wonder of it all 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 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. As ole Andy Rooney might say, "Didja ever wonder why you're so fond of one thing over another, like your favorite ice cream, or soap or country road? I know I have..." There are probably reasons, way back in our childhood, or because of what our parents either did or didn't do. Same goes for the things we fear most; most of them are the products of lies we were told or hurts we felt. But 'didja ever wonder why you're so fond of your kids?' Not really. Mad as heck at them, sure, but the love is just built in, unless something catastrophic or toxic comes along to drive it out. It is the bliss of growth: we know not how or why a seed works the way it does, but we are certainly glad of it.

This is what Jesus is telling us about the Love of God, (the 'Kingdom' is how we translate it these days). 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; and 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 around to Singapore. Not sure I believe that one. But the idea that

every heartbeat of love is felt by the universe and ripples infinitely outward rings true.

The mustard seed is the love of 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 leaves room for every one of us. Our beginnings and our personal power are neither an indication nor a measure of our grace and potential for love. Now, this here pine 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.

Hymn 290 Come, ye thankful people come

Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest-home:
All is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin;
God, our Maker, doth provide for our wants to be supplied;
Come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest-home.

Even so, Lord, quickly come, to thy final harvest-home;
Gather thou thy people in, free from sorrow, free from sin;
There, for ever purified, in thy presence to abide;
Come, with all thine angels come, raise the glorious harvest-home.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jc98lQBGIW0>

On the Wing

Once in a dream (for once I dreamed of you)
We stood together in an open field;
Above our heads two swift-winged pigeons wheeled,
Sporting at east and courting full in view:—
When loftier still a broadening darkness flew,
Down-swooping, and a ravenous hawk revealed;
Too weak to fight, too fond to fly, they yield;
So farewell life and love and pleasures new.
Then as their plumes fell fluttering to the ground,
Their snow-white plumage flecked with crimson drops,
I wept, and thought I turned towards you to weep:
But you were gone; while rustling hedgerow tops
Bent in a wind which bore to me a sound
Of far-off piteous bleat of lambs and sheep.

Christina Rossetti