



Celebrate

Sunday, June 16, 2024
4th Sunday after Pentecost

The mustard seed becomes a great shrub that shelters the birds, recalling ancient images of the tree of life. We'd expect a cedar or a sequoia, but Jesus finds the power of God better imaged in a tiny, no-account seed. It's not the way we expect divine activity to look. Yet the tree of life is here, in the cross around which we gather, the tree into which we are grafted through baptism, the true vine that nourishes us with its fruit in the cup we share. It may not appear all that impressive, but while nobody's looking it grows with a power beyond our understanding.

Prayer of the Day

O God, you are the tree of life, offering shelter to all the world. Graft us into yourself and nurture our growth, that we may bear your truth and love to those in need, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Tree imagery is used in a messianic prophecy to tell how the LORD will choose someone from Judah's royal family (the cedar tree) to reign over all creation. This tree will be planted on Mount Zion, the location of the holy temple.

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.

²³On 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.

²⁴All 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

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; refrain, Ps. 92:12

The righteous shall spread a broad like a cedar of Lebanon.

It is a good thing to give thanks ¹ to the LORD,
to sing praise to your name, ¹ O Most High;
²to herald your love ¹ in the morning
and your faithful- ¹ness at night;
³on the psaltery, and ¹ on the lyre,
and to the melody ¹ of the harp.
⁴For you have made me glad by your ¹ acts, O LORD;
and I shout for joy because of the works ¹ of your hands. **R**
¹²The righteous shall flourish ¹ like a palm tree,
and shall spread abroad like a ce- ¹dar of Lebanon.
¹³Those who are planted in the house ¹ of the LORD
shall flourish in the courts ¹ of our God;
¹⁴they shall still bear fruit ¹ in old age;
they shall be ¹ green and succulent;
¹⁵that they may show how up- ¹right the LORD is,
my rock, in whom there is ¹ no injustice. **R**

Second Reading

2 Corinthians 5:6-10 [11-13] 14-17

Paul encourages believers to live by faith and not by sight. We do not consider Jesus from a human perspective but through the eyes of faith, believing he died for all and was raised. All who are in Christ are now in God's new creation.

So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For 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.

[¹¹Therefore, 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. ¹²We 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. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.] ¹⁴For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. ¹⁵And 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.

¹⁶From 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. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Gospel

Mark 4:26-34

Jesus frequently uses parables to teach ordinary people as they are able to hear and understand. Images of sowing and growing show the vitality of God's kingdom.

[Jesus said,] “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

³⁰He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? ³¹It

is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³²yet 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.”

³³With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

We come before the triune God to pray for our communities, ourselves, and our world.

A brief silence.

Nourish your faithful people through gifts of word and worship. Guide the church in listening to and interpreting your message of grace for this time and place in history. In your wisdom, lead us in expanding the reach of your love. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Nature sings your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. Sustain the holy rhythms of creation: days and seasons, hibernation and activity, phases of the moon and tides of the sea. Let these patterns assure us of your constancy. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

You raise the lowly and humble those in high regard. Raise up all who are victims of marginalization, discrimination, and hate. As we anticipate Juneteenth, banish white supremacy and bigotry from the hearts of your people and remove the inclination toward anger and violence. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Tend to all who journey by faith and who wait with patience for the fulfillment of your healing promises (*especially*). Grant perseverance to people doing physical and occupational therapy, people living with mobility concerns, and people facing chronic pain. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

As you have loved us, so let us love one another. Empower fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, adoptive fathers, and chosen fathers to embody this gift of love for their children. Where these relationships are strained or broken, bring your comfort and peace. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

With gratitude, we remember (*the Emanuel Nine martyrs and all*) the saints who are now at home with you. Plant seeds of their wisdom and witness in our hearts, that we grow in faith until we join them in your heavenly dwelling. Merciful God,
receive our prayer.

Receive our prayers, O God, and come quickly to our aid, through the power of the Spirit and the love of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (commemoration of the Emanuel Nine, martyrs, 2015) Psalm 52. **Tuesday** Revelation 21:22—22:5. **Wednesday** Luke 6:43-45. **Thursday** Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32. **Friday** (commemoration of Onesimos Nesib, translator, evangelist, 1931) Acts 21:1-16. **Saturday** Luke 21:25-28. **5th Sunday after Pentecost** Job 38:1-11; Psalm 107:1-3, 23-32; 2 Corinthians 6:1-13; Mark 4:35-41.

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