

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Third Sunday after Pentecost - Year B

67th Week of Pandemic - Third Indoor Service

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15

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

Mark 4:26-34

06/13/2021

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark:

26[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.

The Gospel of our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Majestic... Shrub?**

Good morning! I'm not sure if you are aware of this... but sometimes I'm an idiot. This was especially true when I was younger. So, back in high school when it was time to go see the play that some students had been working on, me and two of my friends decided to skip class. The plays always started right after lunch and most teachers didn't take attendance, so we would leave for lunch and just not come back. The de facto spot for us to hang out was at one of our friends' houses where we could go and mess around in the woods. During our walk we decided that it would be fun to cut down a tree. Now, we weren't really educated in forest management, so we made the stupid decision to cut down a nice living tree, instead of something that was dead standing. But we couldn't just cut down any old tree! No, we decided to cut down the biggest tree we could find. So, we found ourselves in the hollow staring up at a gigantic oak tree. Easily as thick as the tree in my backyard, which is around 35-40 inches in diameter, but much TALLER. So with nothing but my 3 1/2 lbs craftsman axe and smaller Fiskars two handed hatchet we got to work. So, to recap, the list of idiot decisions so far are as follows: we skipped school, decided to cut down a huge living tree that sustained many local animals, decided to play with sharp tools when and where nobody else was even aware of what was happening... and we were attempting all of this with a cheap axe and a hatchet. I'm honestly surprised I have lived as long as I have.

Well, as you would expect, it turns out cutting down a large tree takes a little time. We worked in shifts, but after the first hour, our hands were blistered and we were exhausted. But again, we were teenage boys, so there was no turning back now! All told, I think it took us at least 2 hours of constant cutting, rotating between three 16-17 year olds before we finally

heard that wonderful cracking noise that told us it was ready to fall. It was here that we made the only smart decision all day, with two of us standing back while the other finished the cut and ran as it started to tip. If you've never watched a tree fall down, let alone one this large, it's a spectacle to behold. When a big tree is falling, it looks like it's happening in slow motion because there is just so much mass. Then, all of the sudden, BOOM! It crashes down, usually breaking off branches and sending them flying off. So there we stood, admiring the last several hours of labor... smiling and congratulating ourselves. Then we realized it had fallen directly over the off-road path we used for the dirt bikes and four wheelers. So we had essentially spent the last 2 hours blocking a trail. Great job right?

Whenever I used to read today's Gospel reading about the mustard seed I would always imagine something like that giant oak tree that we cut down. A massive and tall tree that provides life and shade all around. There's only one problem...that's completely wrong. The average height of a mature mustard plant can range between 6-20 feet. I don't know about you, but the parable isn't looking so impressive anymore, is it?

It wasn't until I preached on it for the first time that I realized it, but that's the point that Jesus is trying to make! You see, because the images, examples, and illustrations from scripture all arrive to us with at least 2,000 years of baggage, we can often miss the point the text is trying to make. We read it in the Bible, and then ascribe to it moral or prestigious value. Take the story of the Good Samaritan, the whole point of the text was that there had never been a good Samaritan! So, when we read about the mustard plant that grows large enough to mirror the Kingdom of God, we assume it must be some massive plant, home to the greatest of animals. What we don't expect is a shrub.

And that's what we get. A mustard bush. Think of the stuff growing around the edge of the woods, or some overgrown backyard. That is the image Jesus is creating in the text! But again, this is deliberate! While eagles may nest in the treetops, Jesus isn't about creating a safe place for those who already rule the food chain. Think of some overgrown bush in yours or your neighbor's backyard... what lives there? The lowest of the low, right? Around my house I'll see small rabbits or field mice hiding under such shrubs. Or in the midst of a heavy summer storm it's the small birds that hide in their branches, unable to brave the strong winds of the tall trees.

To put it another way, the strong don't need the protection, it's the weak. And so we get this wonderful Gospel reading. One scholar writes that *"There is a sharp contrast between small beginnings (the seeds) and great conclusions (the harvest, the great bush); something is happening in the present (the process of growth), and the process is mysterious to humans. (The seed growing automatē, the small mustard seed turning into a large bush), which suggests divine guidance... Their message was one of hope for Jesus' discouraged followers and for the persecuted pre-Markan community. They affirmed that despite the rejection and opposition that Jesus' 'word' encountered, the 'seed' sown in and through Jesus is growing and mysteriously moving toward the fullness of God's kingdom."*<sup>1</sup>

As is true with so many of our Gospel lessons, it's a story of hope. Which makes me ask the question: who needs this message of hope? Well St. Paul's... that's a question I hope that we can explore together in the next few weeks. So stay tuned. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Donahue, John R., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of Mark*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2002. pp. 153-154.

