

## Saint Matthew's/San Mateo Episcopal Church

### 3 Pentecost, Proper 6, June 13, 2021

#### READINGS:

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14

2 Corinthians 5:5-10 (11-13), 14-17

Mark 4:26-34

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Do you have a green thumb? God does!! Just look at our readings today. They are all about growth in God's kingdom!

In our reading from the prophet Ezekiel, God is growing a great tree from a cutting he will take from another tree's young twigs. When it is grown, on the top of a high mountain, it will produce wood AND fruit. Every kind of bird and other flying creatures will live in it, and all of the trees of the field will know that God is the Lord.

The Psalmist sings his thanks and praises to God, and tells us that those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish. They will, he says, bear fruit even in old age, and be green and succulent to show how upright the Lord is.

And Jesus, as he does so often, is telling stories in our reading from Mark's gospel. His stories compare growing plants from seeds with God's kingdom!

"The kingdom of God," he says, is as if someone scatters seed on the ground, and then sleeps and rises night and day, not knowing how the seed grows into grain for his harvest, but knowing when harvest time is.

Then he says that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. It is very small when it is first sown, but it grows into a large shrub, big enough and with large branches, like the tree in our Ezekiel reading, "so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

God is a real master gardener. He is much better than anyone with a Master Gardener certificate from the University's Cooperative Extension Service! He is so, so much better at making things grow than I am! And yet, I feel such a closeness to him in these readings, as he plants a cutting to grow a tree and monitors tiny seeds as they become hefty shrubs!

Many of you know that I have a cactus garden. I know about the plants in my collection something that God, of course, also knows. If you cut a stem or a pad from a cactus, let it dry for a few days, and then plant it about a third of its length deep in dry soil, it will grow, over time and with care, into a replica of the cactus you cut it from.

Some of my cactus plants have flowers that take your breath away. Some have shapes that amaze. All, of course, have the ability to defend themselves from unwanted attention with spines or clumps of fluffy looking but very irritating hair-like glochids. They are beautiful, and they are tough. Even so, they need attention when they live in my yard, and not in the wild places where God plants them. To help them grow, I have to nurture them, AND be patient as I wait for them to bloom each year.

Here is a tiny cactus from my garden. I separated it from a clump of its brothers and sisters about a month ago. In the photo is one of its relatives in my garden. It is two feet tall and covered with pink flowers.

I am good at growing cactus from cuttings. But, I am not a fraction the gardener God is; I have never grown one from a seed! That is much harder! I plan to try that this summer, using the seeds in my little bottle! By the way, cactus seeds, like mustard seeds, are pretty small - about the size of the head of a sewing pin.

God plants a tiny sprig, and it becomes a mighty cedar to shade and shelter life.

The seed the farmer scatters grows: first the sprout, then the ear, then the ripe wheat.

A tiny mustard seed becomes a large shrub, with plenty of room for birds to nest in its branches.

God's kingdom, planted in our hearts, is like the cedar sprig, the wheat, the mustard seed.

Jesuit priest John Kavanaugh says: "Life is slow and subtle. Love takes time to show and grow. In life, little acts count. In fact, that is what a life is all about, a long parade of moments deceptively inconsequential."

God plants his kingdom in our hearts. It starts small, and we can help it grow! How wonderful that God allows us to be the gardeners who care for his kingdom, within us and beyond us, in the world!

In life, little acts count.

Caring for my cactus collection is a series of small acts. They grow when I water them, but not too much! The best flowers appear after I feed them. Sometimes I re-plant them in larger pots, or cut them back because they have grown too big for the space I have for them. They are so generous with their flowers that my excited neighbors are growing new cactus gardens from the cuttings we make!

In life, little acts count.

Caring for God's kingdom, within us and beyond us, is also a series of small acts. The Reverend Jazzy Bostock suggests in one of her sermons that we water our small seedlings when we pray or meditate, taking time to "be" with God. The seeds of the kingdom thrive when we take a Sabbath rest, allowing time to replenish our spirits. The kingdom grows in us when we study scripture. It grows in us every time we reach out a hand to a neighbor who needs us in that moment.

Jesus' parables about God's kingdom are not mostly about heaven, but about God's reign on earth! Remember that mustard seed, how small it starts out? Remember those birds, nesting in the shade of the shrub that grows from it?

Every time a Christian does God's will, the kingdom grows. The more we fulfill God's will in our lives, the greater the kingdom of God will be in us. But, not to worry if we sometimes slip up! God allows for setbacks, and even for seasons without blooms. If we hold on to even a mustard seed's worth of faith and obedience, we still have the kingdom of God within us. We can ask forgiveness and try again.

Saint Paul tells us today that those who are in Christ are a new creation - everything old has passed away, he says, and ..."See, everything has become new!" Good news! God has already planted the seed of his kingdom in us, and we are new! Now he is waiting patiently, watching as we grow into mountain-top cedars and large shrubs, providing shade and shelter, and maybe even beautiful flowers, for all his children!

So, don't worry too much if you don't have a green thumb, at least all the time! Remember, God is the real Master Gardener, and he does!!! The Good News is that God's kingdom is certain! The scattered seed will yield a harvest, and the tiny seed will grow into a large plant!

Amen.