

11th Sunday of Ordinary Time

June 13, 2021

By Sister Patricia Crowley

Ezekiel 17: 22-24; II Corinthians 5: 6-10; Mark 4:26-34

I. Introduction

We are back in Ordinary Time and in some ways, as our city opens up again, it may feel a tiny bit more ordinary!

Ezechiel's splendid image in today's first reading leads us to the gospel's message. The eclectic book of the prophet, Ezekiel, describes the action of God that takes the top of a somewhat strong, beautiful, & durable tree and plants it high on a lofty mountain top and then, promises that this tree will have luscious branches and much fruit and will be a home to many creatures. The prophet, of course, is predicting the flourishing of the kingdom of Israel in David's reign and giving the people great hope.

The gospel passage we just heard points to the reign of God after Jesus Resurrection and does so with the words "the kingdom of God" explained to a point in other images!

In both of these passages, growth occurs in hidden ways and not because of human efforts. The spiritual life is nurtured in hidden ways within us and we don't always recognize what is happening.

II. Mark's Gospel

Mark's Gospel begins with a declaration of who Jesus is / was - *This is the (gospel) the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* It ends, in the longer version, with the story of the Ascension and, in the shorter version, with *a proclamation of eternal life or salvation in God.*

Mark's gospel seems to me to have three distinct themes: 1. The identity of Jesus, often called the "messianic secret"; 2. the discipleship to which each of us is called; and 3. the question of how God's presence will continue in new ways, referred to as the *kingdom of God* in Mark.

We need to remember in the presentation of that last theme today that Mark is talking to people whose expectations have not been met.

III. The Kin(g)dom of God

Language is important. To Jesus' listeners and to Mark's readers, the Ezekiel image of "Kingdom" would have resonated deeply because of their preferred sense of that form of government. Some of us...are attracted to current royal stories, of course.

Mark uses this term some 14 times; Luke 31 times; John twice; and Matthew only 3 times for he prefers the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven".

However, today, many writers substitute the word KINdom for kingdom and perhaps that could be seen as even closer to what Jesus meant to leave us human beings. Kindom connotes human solidarity, the real theme of Fratelli Tutti! Think about some of things that happened during this pandemic....people joining in song each evening from their windows in New York....people connecting via zoom across the miles....

The subtlety of the 3rd theme in Mark's gospel prompts Jesus to use parables to help people see beyond the obvious. Today's gospel passage uses two:

A. Seed planted by a farmer

This is how it is with the kin(g)dom of God.....it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land and.....

What intrigued me on this reading of Mark's story was the sense that as life goes on and we eat and sleep and rise again, the seed continues to grow and the farmer *knows not how!* *Of its own accord, it sprouts and grows, first the blade and then, the ear, and then the full grain in the ear.*

So, too the kindom.....we grow and most of the time we know not how. We become aware of the Risen Christ in very new ways one day and we know not how that happened. The seed (the kindom) grows within us.....

B. A mustard seed

To what shall we compare the kin(g)dom of God or what parable can we use for it?

Mary McGoin calls this parable "a mischievous analogy" for the mustard seed is actually a weed. I suspect that is an apt description of this parable. Barbara Reid OP calls the mustard seed "a tenacious plant...hard to get rid of." Jesus knew how far-fetched the mystery of the Kindom of God would seem so to invite his listeners (us) to compare it to a weed that grows where we don't expect it and which becomes quite

large without our really noticing its growth...that would catch their and our attention for sure. That approach is the way of parable!

IV. In Christ all has changed.....

In the gospels we sense that Jesus knew that his presence among us would change human life and earthly life forever and that he also sensed that change would be illusive to us human beings. Mark seems to recognize this with the ending words of the gospel: *Without parables he did not speak to them, but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.* And we know that even those who heard the private explanation did not grasp the profundity of his teaching, nor do we.

V. Conclusion

How will we wrap our heads around this mystery?

Growth happens - Seeds become plants and bear fruit or flowers sometimes without much human intervention. The kin(g)dom of God is that way. God acts within us and we know not how....We have the seed and we are called to live out that indescribable inheritance.

The hidden process goes on.