

Pentecost 3

June 13, 2021

Ezekiel 17:22-24

²² Thus says the Lord GOD: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest. ²⁴ And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it."

Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14

¹ It is a good thing to give thanks | to the LORD,*
and to sing praises to your name, | O Most High;
² to tell of your lovingkindness early | in the morning*
and of your faithfulness in | the night season;
³ on the psaltery, and | on the lyre,*
and to the melody | of the harp.
⁴ For you have made me glad by your | acts, O LORD;*
and I shout for joy because of the works | of your hands.
¹¹ The righteous shall flourish | like a palm tree,*
and shall spread abroad like a ce- | dar of Lebanon.
¹² Those who are planted in the house | of the LORD*
shall flourish in the courts | of our God;
¹³ they shall still bear fruit | in old age;*
they shall be | green and succulent;
¹⁴ that they may show how up- | right the LORD is,*
my rock, in whom there | is no fault.

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

⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹² We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³ For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵ and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Mark 4:26-34

²⁶ And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. ²⁷ He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. ²⁸ The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

³⁰ And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? ³¹ It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. ³⁴ He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.

Message: "I Got This!" – a Matter of Trust

Back in April I had the great privilege to be with Allan Wessels as he ran a once-every-five-years check on the emergency generator just outside of town. It was a test to ensure that the system was capable of handling the demands of the entire town of Strawberry Point plus supply current back into the grid for an assigned prolonged period of time.

Amid the sound of the diesel engines coming up to speed and the smell of fluids and the unique odor of electrical switchboards, I was taken back to my years in the Navy when I was assigned to the ship's turbine generator crew. We were responsible for operating and maintaining the machinery that provided electrical power for the entire ship while at sea. When something catastrophic occurs and contacts start popping, lights start flashing and sparks begin to fly, the frequent reaction of crews trained on this equipment is to reach for the board and start throwing breakers in an effort to stave off a further disaster. This is a mistake! In such a situation, the instructions to the switchboard crew is to put your hands in your pockets and take one step backwards!

The system is designed to fail to a safe condition, and any attempts to jump in and "help" inevitably result in much more damage and danger than if it had been left to function as the engineers had designed and constructed it. It's a matter of trust. The switchboard operator needed to be able to hear the voice of the engineer saying, "Wait for it...I got this!"

Not too long ago I saw the video clip of a young woman with Downs Syndrome, Amy Bockerstette, who is a champion golfer. Alongside Gary Woodland, a PGA pro, Amy had just chipped out of a bunker onto the green at the 16th hole of the prestigious Arizona course. Unsure if she had the skill to complete the hole, Gary asked her if she wanted him to step in and "help" – to putt it out for her. Her response has become legendary: "I got this!", she told him. And proceeded to sink the put! It was a matter of trust.

The scripture we heard from Ezekiel was the conclusion to a grim reminder to the people of Israel of who is in charge. Hidden amid the images of tender sprouts from lofty cedars was the repeated reminder that God has got this! "I myself will take, I will break off, I myself will plant, I will bring low the high tree and make high the low tree; I have spoken, and I will do

it!" It was a painful reminder of a particularly devastating time in their history.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had planted Jerusalem on a good well-watered soil so that as a noble vine, it could bear fruit without turning to Egypt. Ezekiel's allegory indicated that God had a plan in place involving Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. But Zedekiah however, saw the Babylonian exile as nothing but a catastrophe and resolved to step in and fix it himself! He rebelled against Babylon and formed what he thought was an alliance with Egypt who promised protection. Egypt reneged and Jerusalem paid the price; he had failed to trust. Ezekiel's message that we heard this morning reinstates God's promise – a messianic prophesy that a noble cedar of God's planting will rise up and every kind of bird – all the nations – will find shelter in its branches: "I got this – wait for it!"

Although the farmer plays an important role in the cultivation of his field—after all, he sows the seed—its growth occurs apart from his efforts, even as he sleeps; it sprouts and grows; he knows not how. Even today, many aspects of horticulture remain a mystery. The more one studies nature, the more one marvels at its intricacy, as well as the wisdom and power of its Lord. Even with our significantly more advanced scientific knowledge of agriculture and seed germination, there is still a level of mystery involved. For all our wisdom, we still don't know what really happens, what really allows for a seven-foot-tall corn plant bearing two or more ears with an average of kernels per ear to spring from a single seed! At some point it becomes a matter of trust. Even amid an increasing drought, imagine the catastrophe that would result if a farmer decided to dig up the seeds to "help them along"!

The earth does not actually produce growth "by itself". The plant owes its growth to the power of God, who both creates and sustains the natural order. Growth in the Kingdom is similarly the result of God's Word and Spirit, not the speaker or hearer. God's kingdom grows mysteriously of itself, at its own pace, and through the power of the Word. The Augsburg Confession declares that the Holy Spirit creates faith where and when he pleases in those who hear the gospel. This reality often causes frustration among us who eagerly long for a rapid expansion of the Kingdom, and all the more as we only have a short-term view of things. But God's kingdom grows according to His plan and timetable! We believe that by our own power and understanding that we cannot believe in Christ Jesus our Lord or come to him!

Luther reminds us in the Small Catechism that the First Commandment is that we should fear, love, and trust God above all things. Over and over in

our lives we need to listen to and trust His Word in Christ Jesus as he reminds us, "Wait for it...I got this!"

THE PRAYERS

Let us pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of the Church, the world, and one another.

A brief silence

Thank you, dear Lord, for making your Kingdom begin so humbly in our midst! Thank you for making it a place of welcome and shelter for all, even for nesting birds. Thank you for not overwhelming us with your glory and power. Make our faith and love grow like cedar sprigs and mustard seeds, to your glory and for the good of our neighbor.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Clothe your Church with the beauty, holiness, and righteousness of Christ. Make it a lovely dwelling-place for all people. Grant that its words and deeds may bear the fruit which you desire, and which last unto eternity.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We lift before you the plight of Christians around the world who are persecuted for your Name's sake. Let their suffering yield a rich harvest of faith, love, and forgiveness. Shield and defend your missionaries, especially when they are met with hostility and rejection.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Plant this congregation firmly in Christ, our living water. May we abide in his love, share his forgiveness, teach his commandments, and share in his righteousness.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Bless our graduates with wisdom and uprightness of heart. Fulfil in them the Psalmist's words, and make them like trees planted beside streams of living water.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Teach our earthly rulers to walk not in the counsel of the ungodly; nor stand in the way of sinners; nor sit in the seat of scoffers. Teach them to delight on your Law; to meditate on it day and night; and to establish it as the source of justice, truth, and well-being among all people.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Keep in your care all who defend life, liberty, and justice. Teach them your commandments. Fill their minds with wisdom, their hearts with integrity, and their arms with courage and strength.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give to all who suffer the refreshing waters of your compassion and healing. Make them dwell in the safety of your care even in the midst of all that troubles them. Especially we remember before you Randy Chevalier, Dean Puffett, Charles Green, the VansCoy family, Johnny Feulner, Dolores Rodela, Mary Ann Helmricks, Mary Rathe, Duane Lowry, Amy Cooper, and Pr. David Steffensen. Help us to speak words of encouragement and offer deeds of kindness to them. Bring us, with them, into the unending joy of your Kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you for gathering into the spacious branches of your heavenly Kingdom all the redeemed who have gone before us, especially those we love and miss the most. Grant that we may always find refreshment in your Word, blessing in your Sacraments, guidance in your Spirit, and forgiveness in your Son, so that, with all your people, we may be gathered into the welcoming shelter of your embrace and may abide there in joy forever.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**