

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JUNE 13, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA



PRELUDE

O Worship the King

Setting: Jan Bender and Paul Soulek

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN (Stand) #804 Sts. 1, 4, 6

O Worship the King

- 1 O worship the King,
all-glorious above.
O gratefully sing
His pow'r and His love;
Our shield and defender,
the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendor
and girded with praise.

- 4 Thy bountiful care
what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air,
it shines in the light,
It streams from the hills,
it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distills
in the dew and the rain.

- 6 O measureless Might,
ineffable Love,
While angels delight
to hymn Thee above,
Thy humbler creation,
though feeble their lays,
With true adoration
shall sing to Thy praise.

CONFESSIO AND FORGIVENESS

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.

Since we are gathered to hear God's Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and

confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

(We observe a moment of silence for self-reflection.)

Together we pray:

Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Almighty God, merciful Father, in Holy Baptism You declared us to be Your children and gathered us into Your one, holy Church, in which You daily and richly forgive us our sins and grant us new life through Your Spirit. Be in our midst, enliven our faith, and graciously receive our prayer and praise; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

**1 To God on high be glory
And peace to all the earth;
Goodwill from God in heaven
Proclaimed at Jesus' birth!
We praise and bless You, Father;
Your holy name, we sing—
Our thanks for Your great glory,
Lord God, our heav'nly King.**

**2 To You, O sole-begotten,
The Father's Son, we pray;
O Lamb of God, our Savior,
You take our sins away.
Have mercy on us, Jesus;
Receive our heartfelt cry,
Where You in pow'r are seated
At God's right hand on high—**

**3 For You alone are holy;
You only are the Lord.
Forever and forever,
Be worshiped and adored;
You with the Holy Spirit
Alone are Lord Most High,
In God the Father's glory.
"Amen!" our glad reply.**

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us pray. Blessed Lord,
since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON (Be seated)

Ezekiel 17:22-24

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. 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. 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."

This is the Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

PSALM 1 (Read responsively)

Blessèd is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
**but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.**

He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.
**The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.**

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
**for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ALLELUIA VERSE (Stand)

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL

Mark 4:26-34

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the 4th chapter

Glory to You, O Lord.

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

And he said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 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."

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

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen. Dear friends in Christ:

The April showers have brought their May flowers and now, here in June, all the other plants are growing too. Garden plants are well on their way. Weeds are popping up everywhere. The grass needs constant mowing. The forest keeps creeping in. Lots and lots of growing.

Today's words from Jesus tell us that the kingdom of God is growing. And as he had done in an earlier parable, Jesus uses the image of seeds growing into plants to convey the message.

That earlier parable, you may recall, explained why Jesus' message does not always take root in a person's heart. As with seeds, God's Word might not fall on good soil, or might get plucked away before germinating, or might get choked by another plant with thorns.

Here, in today's two short parables, Jesus has other messages about the kingdom's growth. According to the first of these, the growth comes on its own, mysteriously, without our help or knowledge. According to the second, the growth is abundant – and surprisingly so.

These parables are important because they cause us to think about how and where the growth which Jesus promises occurs. And we need to think about these questions, because the growth of the kingdom is not always so easily seen.

As we're thinking, we must also consider what Jesus means when he tells of the Kingdom of God. What is this kingdom? And what does it look like? Let's address this question first.

Jesus, we know, told many parables about the kingdom. This should indicate to us that the kingdom is not so easily described. Luther, however, did his best to give it a shot in the Small Catechism. While explaining the second petition of the Lord's Prayer – where we pray "thy kingdom come" – Luther said: "the kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us his Holy Spirit, so that by his grace we believe his holy word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity." Here Luther is specifically answering the question of "how" God's kingdom comes, saying that it comes through the giving of the Spirit. But the explanation also lists the two elements which make up the kingdom. These are faith in God's Word and obedience to God's commands. The kingdom is found wherever people believe the Word and lead godly lives according to it.

Interestingly, in that same explanation to the prayer, when Luther first asks the general question: "What does this mean?" we see that his answer echoes the teaching of today's first parable. "The kingdom of God," Luther says, "certainly comes by itself without our prayer." In other words, the kingdom is not reliant on us. It shows up on its own – just like a seed producing a plant. Luther must certainly have had this parable of Jesus in mind when he formulated his explanation.

The kingdom comes by itself. The words of the parable make this very clear, for Jesus tells us it happens when the man sleeps, and with him "knowing not how," and with the earth producing "by itself," which is "automate" in the Greek, from where we get our English word "automatic."

This understanding of the Kingdom's growth is critical to the church's understanding of its task. It tells us that our task is simply to plant the seeds of God's Word. And that's all we can do. The germination of the seeds into faith will only come about through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can't make it happen. The growth of God's kingdom comes only through the Spirit.

This doesn't mean, however, that the church is simply to sit back and watch. Not at all. We have an important task to do. We are to spread God's Word.

This past Saturday I went to an evangelism presentation at a neighboring Lutheran church. The presenter, Greg Finke, made many excellent points – most of which can be found in his book *Joining Jesus on His Mission*. The presentation certainly supported the work we as church traditionally do together – things such as proclaiming God’s Word in sermons, printed materials, websites, etc. And yet, this was not the main focus of the presentation.

Finke’s main focus was on what we as individual members can do to plant the seed of God’s Word. It called us to be “everyday missionaries” – people who cultivate relationships with others in which we can show Jesus’ love through what we say and do and tell about Jesus when the opportunities arise.

Consistent with our text today, one of Finke’s main points is that we are in mission “with” Jesus and not “for” Jesus. We do our part, and he does his. We don’t have to do his part “for” him. This approach relieves some of the pressure we often feel. And it allows the Spirit to work as the Spirit knows best. I’m thinking it might be good for us to study this approach further when we return to our Sunday Bible Class this fall.

As Jesus explains in the parable, the kingdom of God grows in ways that we will not always see. Yes, some growth seems very apparent – like when there are more people in church, or increased giving, or growth in godly understanding and maturity. But even these measures only present so clear a picture. Are the people in attendance actually engaged? Is stewardship giving truly indicative of faithfulness? Are people really understanding Jesus’ message or have they just gained knowledge? Are people really maturing in faith or are they just learning how to survive in the world?

The kingdom grows as people reflect its values. The kingdom grows as people live honestly and generously. The kingdom grows as people grow in faith and obedience. The kingdom may decline in some places but grow in others. The kingdom may decline in some people but grow in others.

Luther’s teaching in the Catechism points to the growth which takes place in the individual when he says: “We pray in this petition that [the kingdom] may come to us also.” We all need to grow in faith and obedience. And the Spirit is always willing to teach.

When we turn to today’s second parable from Jesus, we hear him promise that this growth of the kingdom is also abundant. The kingdom is like a mustard seed – a very small seed that grows into a very large bush. The growth is remarkable – larger than expected and significant!

Jesus tells us that it grows “larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” And here Jesus has moved beyond a literal description of a mustard plant, and instead chosen words to do more teaching about the kingdom.

The kingdom of God, teaches Jesus, is indeed greater than all the other kingdoms of the world because only it provides true shelter. And here Jesus uses words from the prophet Ezekiel – heard by us today as our first reading. These words of Ezekiel prophesy the great new kingdom God will plant someday – its greatness signified by the great Cedar trees of that area. The kingdom will be started from a small sprig taken from an old one. And it will be planted on a mountain for all to see. And grow to become very noble.

And in that noble new kingdom people will find shelter – just like birds find shelter in a great tree. Notice, too, how Ezekiel mentions that “every kind of bird” will find shelter. He even repeats the thought, saying “every sort will nest.” Ezekiel clearly prophesies the world-wide mission of Jesus.

Yes, the growth of God’s kingdom will be abundant. It will be abundant in numbers of people, and it will be abundant in what it does to the individual. Those who find shelter in the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus will grow in ways that are noble and good.

Here at St. Paul’s, in our mission statement, we say that the good news of Jesus’ salvation is “life-changing.” We say this to acknowledge both the change in status before God given by the message as well as the ongoing growth that takes place.

Jesus hints at these two changes in today's first parable. Regarding the ongoing growth, note Jesus' detailed description of the seed's progress: "First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear." The seed is on a journey. And the journey is about growing to maturity.

This maturity takes place while a person "sleeps and rises, night and day" - which not only describes how the growth occurs automatically but also hints at the key elements which bring the growth. According to other teachings of Jesus, "sleep" is an indicator of death, while "rising" is the word used for resurrection. Our journey in Jesus is marked by daily dying and rising to sin. Again, Luther captures this in the Catechism, explaining how Baptism indicates "that that Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

After Jesus notes the growth of the seed into a full plant, he tells us that "when the grain is ripe, at once [the farmer] puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." This is a reference to the final judgment, using words very similar to those of the prophet Joel. Jesus' reference is meant to remind us that our status before God must be right when our last day comes. For God will judge our life based on the fruit we produce.

Thankfully, Jesus gives us his own status before God when we place our faith in him. Jesus is the one who slept in the tomb and rose from the grave. He is the one who endured the night of suffering and now lives in the glorious light of eternal day. Jesus is the one who stands tall and noble on the holy mountain of God, beckoning all to accept the shelter he offers.

Today's parable points ahead to this great message. It's a foreshadowing of things to come.

It's most direct message, however, is a different kind of promise. In this parable, the harvest is primarily meant to tell us that God finishes what he starts. The harvest is a sign of the good news that someday we will be gathered into the arms of God. The pains and frustrations which always come with growth will then be ended. This is the promise of God that St. Paul echoed to the Philippians, and that we remember when we pray in the liturgy: "May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Yes, the Lord Jesus promises growth to his people. The growth comes through the Spirit, and often mysteriously – without our help or knowledge. The growth is also abundant. And surprisingly so.

Earlier in the sermon we looked at Luther's teaching on the second petition from the Small Catechism. Let's close today with some words of his on that petition from the Large Catechism:

Luther said: "You see that we are praying here not for a crust of bread or for a temporal, perishable blessing, but for an eternal, priceless treasure and everything that God himself possesses. It would be far too great for any human heart to dare to desire if God himself had not commanded us to ask for it. But because he is God, he claims the honor of giving far more abundantly and liberally than anyone can comprehend – like an eternal, inexhaustible fountain which, the more it gushes forth and overflows, the more it continues to give."

We have such a God. And we live in such a kingdom.

May God bless us with kingdom growth in both faith and obedience – to his glory and our good. Amen.

- 1 Your kingdom, O God, is my glorious treasure,
My pearl of incomparable worth.
Its value exceeds every standard of measure,
Surpassing the wealth of the earth.
Lord, give me Your grace and the power of the Spirit
To value this treasure aright
That, never allured by the world, I inherit
Your kingdom of glory and light.
- 2 Your kingdom, O God, is alive with the power
Your Word and Your Spirit bestow.
Like yeast, they affect the whole measure of flour,
Enabling Your kingdom to grow.
Empower me, Lord, as I live Your commission,
Though humble my service may be,
And bring every planting to perfect fruition,
A mustard seed grown to a tree.
- 3 Your kingdom, O God, is a field for the growing
Of seeds that Your mercy has sown;
But still in our midst is the enemy sowing
The weeds that imperil Your own.
Sustain me, O Lord, till Your day of returning
And harvest me homeward at last,
To shine in the homeland that quiets all yearning,
Where sorrow and danger are past.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Jesus Christ and for all people according to their needs:

The response to each petition will be:

"Lord, in your mercy:"

"hear our prayer."



THE LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION

PREFACE TO HOLY COMMUNION (Stand)

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, for the countless blessings You so freely bestow on us and all creation. Above all, we give thanks for Your boundless love shown to us when You sent Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh and laid on Him our sin, giving Him into death that we might not die eternally. Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

SANCTUS

**Holy, holy, holy Lord
God of Sabaoth adored;
Heaven and earth with full acclaim
shout the glory of Your name.
Sing hosanna in the highest,
sing hosanna to the Lord;
Truly blest is He who comes
in the name of the Lord!**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of all creation, for You have had mercy on us and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

In Your righteous judgment You condemned the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit, and You justly barred them and all their children from the tree of life. Yet, in Your great mercy, You promised salvation by a second Adam, Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and made His cross a life-giving tree for all who trust in Him.

We give You thanks for the redemption You have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may faithfully eat and drink of the fruits of His cross and receive the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation that come to us in His body and blood.

Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

PAX DOMINI

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

AGNUS DEI

**O Jesus Christ, true Lamb of God,
You take the sin of the world away;
O Jesus Christ, true Lamb of God,
Have mercy on us, Lord, we pray.**

**O Jesus Christ true Lamb of God
You take the sin of the world away;
Have mercy on us, Jesus Christ,
And grant us peace, O Lord, we pray.**

DISTRIBUTION (Be seated)

The Communion Assistant will come forward to receive first, then those from the pulpit side – by order of pew, front to back. Communicants will come up the center aisle and return via the side aisle. When all from the pulpit side have communed, the baptismal font side will commune in the same manner. Distancing must be maintained between all communicants. Masks should be kept on except for the moment of consuming the elements. We ask that the wine be consumed away from the tray table. Empty cups should be dropped into the baskets.

COMMUNION MUSIC

Prélude modal By: Jean Langlais

POST-COMMUNION COLLECT (Stand)

BENEDICTION

SENDING HYMN #921

On What has Now Been Sown

- 1 On what has now been sown
Thy blessing, Lord, bestow;
The pow'r is Thine alone
To make it sprout and grow.
Do Thou in grace the harvest raise,
And Thou alone shalt have the praise!**
- 2 To Thee our wants are known,
From Thee are all our pow'rs;
Accept what is Thine own
And pardon what is ours.
Our praises, Lord, and prayers receive,
And to Thy Word a blessing give.**

**3 O grant that each of us,
Now met before Thee here,
May meet together thus
When Thou and Thine appear
And follow Thee to heav'n, our home.
E'en so, amen, Lord Jesus, come!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Be seated)

DISMISSAL

POSTLUDE

*On What Has Been Sown
Setting: Barbara Harbach*

Those serving:

Sunday, June 6, 8:30 a.m.:

Greeter: Christine M. Bell

Comm. assist: Jim Easterly

Reader: Melissa Hecht

10:30 a.m.:

Greeter: Marian Robinson

Comm. assist: Dan Buuck

Reader: Janice Sebring

Acknowledgments

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