

3 S. after Pentecost 6/13/21
 Mark 4:26-34 6B

IT IS LIKE A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED, WHICH, WHEN SOWN ON THE GROUND, IS THE SMALLEST OF ALL THE SEEDS 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.

And He said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it (v. 30)?” And the good news for you is that you don’t have to answer the question because Jesus, being Jesus, gives you the answer to His question. He does that because He wants you to think about it. “It is like a grain of mustard seed,” which is small, quite small, and not impressive at all. Which when you think about it is like the kingdom of God, especially when you think about it in terms of Jesus.

The first reference to Him in the Bible is that He is small; in fact, He called a “seed,” the seed of a woman (cf. Ge 3:15, NKJV). Jesus, very God of very God, came as the small seed of a woman to grow and crush the serpent’s head, that serpent who dragged Adam and Eve, the world, and you and me in the kingdom of sin, death, and hell. He became a baby, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger, and where was that manger? Bethlehem, and you know what the Bible says about Bethlehem, “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (Mi 5:2).

So, this Jesus bringing the kingdom of God is mustard seed small, in a mustard seed size town. But, don’t worry, it only gets worse. He grows up, but where does He grow up? In the small outback of Nazareth; that makes people wonder, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth” (Jn

1:46)? He goes out and does His ministry – which is rather small, it only lasts for three years. And He doesn't surround Himself with big shots – statesmen, generals, and philosophers. No, quite the opposite, He calls the small people to follow Him – fishermen, a tax collector, even former prostitutes follow Him. This man even eats with sinners. And He doesn't have a massive or huge office complex from which He operates. No, He says, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Lk 9:58).

When He comes to the end of His life, He's not surrounded by adoring masses; no, He's abandoned by those He called friends; finally, even abandoned by His Father, as He hangs on the cross of Calvary. Here, He's bearing the load of all the world's sin. He's there, bearing your sin, so that He can be free you from the kingdom of sin, death, and hell, and bring you into the kingdom of God, which is what He what does when He dies on that cross for you.

And His death body is wrapped in a shroud and laid in the ground, like a small, little mustard seed. But three days later like a mustard seed, Jesus rose. He rises from the tomb, alive and well, and branches of His kingdom begin to grow throughout the world. That's what happens after His resurrection as He turns to His disciples and says this to them, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Ac 1:8). Like a teeny, tiny mustard seed, that grows into a mighty tree, this small band of Peter and the guys – about 120 in all – go out and those branches spread to Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, and Rome; to the continent of Africa; and a branch goes to Europe, where it grows to to Germany and to Norway; and the branches keep spreading all the way

across the pond, so that we have a branch right here in Glen Ullin / Beulah.

And Jesus tells you why the branches are there, “so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (v. 32). Did you hear what the Savior said? Jesus says that the kingdom of God is for the birds.

“What parable shall we use to describe it?”

It is like a grain of a 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 put out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade” (vv. 31-32).

This is a wonderful parable about you – because you are like a bird of the air. Paul says that in this tent – that is the tent of our earthly bodies – we groan (cf. 2 Co 5:2). Which is another way of saying we get our feathers ruffled, and honestly, you ruffle a few feathers yourself.

You know what it’s like, all too well. One minute, you’re like a peacock strutting around in all your glory. You’ve got the world by the tail. But then it happens, you do what birds do – you make a mess of your life, and other people’s lives, as well with your lying, gossip, cheating, stealing, fornicating, jealousy, envy. And it is not long before that great accuser, Satan, and the weakness of your own flesh lead you into despair and shame. That’s what sin does – it makes a mess of everything. And for that sin, as you openly confess, you deserve only temporal and eternal punishment.

The branch of the kingdom of God invites you to come and nest and rest in its shade. That is the shade of forgiveness of sins, peace, and joy in Jesus. That is the shade where the cool waters of baptism flow over you;

where the calming words of the absolution are spoken over you; where Jesus gives you His life-giving body and blood to eat and to drink.

This is the shade where Jesus Christ Himself dwells, giving you forgiveness, life, and salvation that He won for you by His innocent suffering and death and when He was buried in the tomb like a mustard seed.

Yes, some people will look at Jesus and His branch and the nest and rest He offers and get all bird-brained about it. “Oh no, not me, I don’t need a branch, a nest, shade,” they say, “I’m fine just the way I am. I don’t need Jesus.” Others will say, “I have no time to go and sit in the shade. I’m far too busy.” Others will say, “What will the other birds I fly around with going to think if I go and rest and find shade in Jesus?”

The good news is that there is room on the branch for every bird, because Jesus died for every bird. Everyone is invited to come in and make a nest and rest in the shade of Jesus. That’s why Jesus invites everyone – and He does it through us, through this branch of Zion / Concordia – to “Come and find shade”.

For in this shade, there is Jesus, to wash you, to feed you, to comfort you, to strengthen you, to forgive you. No matter what mess you’ve made; no matter what sin of thought, word, or deed you have done, the blood of Jesus shed on Calvary forgives in and makes you new.

Take your place in the nest, for this shade, for this place is **FOR THE BIRDS.**