

4 S. after Pentecost 6/16/24
Mark 4:26-34 6B

OUR SERMON TEXT THIS MORNING IS THE WORDS OF OUR GOSPEL LESSON FROM MARK'S GOSPEL, THE 4TH CHAPTER.

Why do birds fly to trees? Birds fly to trees because trees provide shelter, protection. Trees provide a safe haven for birds.

That's why Jesus says to us in our Gospel today, "*Yet when [a grain of mustard seed] 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*" (v. 32). No, Jesus is not giving us a lesson in horticulture or ornithology. He is teaching us about the kingdom of God. And, He is teaching us about the kingdom of God by way of comparison. Just as birds fly to trees for shelter and refuge, we flee to Jesus for shelter and refuge.

We need shelter from the stormy bliss of earthly life, don't we? Paul writes in our Epistle, *For in this tent (that is, the tent of our earthly bodies), we groan, being burdened* (2 Co 5:2). Cancer, infirmity, tragedy, murders, vandalism, tornadoes, floods, hurricanes, gossip, prejudice, bigotry, hatred, anger, injustice, loneliness, and now, we have to concern ourselves with identity theft. We groan and grow weary.

The words of Jesus about the Kingdom of God speak right to our weary, burdened, fear-filled hearts. How do you see God? Is He a king of heavenly watchmaker who created the universe and then stepped out of the picture, leaving everything up in the air? Do you see him as being too holy, too majestic, or too magnificent to care about the day-to-day concerns of people like you and me?

There was a tourist in New York City who went to the Empire State building and rode an elevator to the top observation room. As he was

looking down at the people on the sidewalks far below, he observed how they looked like little ants running to and fro and commented, "I imagine this is the way the people on the earth look to God."

Jesus' words in our parables tell us that is absolutely **wrong!** God does not look down on us from some ivory tower, watching with detached curiosity as we scamper about. Our heavenly Father is a God of love. His greatness lies in His grace -- His undeserved and unending love. **This is a love that will not fail.** Our bodies will wear out; medicine may not have the answer to our ills; people – even those we love very much – may disappoint us -- but the love of God is certain and sure.

This Father's Day, we rejoice that God is our dear Father and we are His dear children. He's concerned about all the burdens, bumps and scratches that come our way. We are not alone. We are sheltered in the hands of our Father who loves us.

God says to us in our Old Testament lesson,

"I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out ... 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...I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it" (Ez 17:22-24).

These words of God are a Messianic promise. The Messiah will come as a sprig, a branch, of the humble house of David. He will come to be our King, to govern over all the world, especially for the benefit of His Church. In Christ, that branch that God plant, we will find shelter and safety and protection.

The Good News of the Gospel is that God kept His Word. Jesus came born of Mary. He endured rejection and persecution in His earthly

life. He suffered great agony of body and soul under Pontius Pilate. He died on the cross for the sins of the world. And, He was buried -- **planted**, if you will -- in the grave.

On the 3rd day, Christ victoriously rose from the grave, defeating our last and greatest enemy, death itself.

Jesus says,

"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" (vv.30-32).

Birds are safe in trees, and we are safe in Jesus.

The farmer in Jesus' parables could be confident about his crop. Even though he did not exactly how his seed would grow, but he had the confidence of knowing it would grow. So, it is with our eternal life with God in heaven. Jesus promised us:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn 14:2-3).

Jesus paid the price for our sin with His precious blood shed on the cross. He rose and ascended into heaven to prepare a place in heaven for you. Our place in heaven has already been reserved and paid for by Jesus Christ Himself, and that guarantees it, no matter what may come our way in earthly life. We do not know what will happen to us along the way of earthly life or when we'll get there, but the one thing God gives us the certainty of knowing: **There is a place reserved in heaven for you!**

As any farmer or gardener knows, one does not plant seeds and then abandon them. Those seeds need sunshine, moisture, and nutrients to

grow and blossom. God gives the seeds life and growth so that those small seeds grow and produce a bountiful harvest.

God's love reaches out to us and embraces us, granting us salvation and eternal life. Through the washing of regeneration of Holy Baptism, He washes us of all our sin, makes us His child, and gives us eternal life. Throughout our earthly lives, our heavenly Father's love continues to embrace us, drawing us ever closer to Himself, sheltering us from the stormy bliss of earthly life. Through His nourishing Word and the Sacrament of the Altar, God feeds us with His grace, feeding the faith He gave to us in our baptism, so that we may grow bold and strong in our Christian faith, being faithful to produce fruits which show we are alive in Christ.

Again, I draw your attention to the words of Paul, *For while we are still in this tent [of a mortal body living in a fallen world], we groan, being burdened.* It is a lie of the devil, the father of all lies, that being a Christian guarantees you health and wealth. Was Jesus wealthy? Was Jesus' life free from trouble? On this side of heaven, Jesus endured hardship and Jesus wept. A disciple is not above his master. We may well have sorrow, toil, and woe. Tears may fill our eyes. But, the good news for us is that we have shelter in Jesus. He is with us. He is our strength. His grace is sufficient for us.

We may be perplexed, confused, frustrated, wondering why this is happening to me. Our emotions and feelings will tell us that God has abandoned us, that we left to fend for ourselves. We remember the words of Paul on the Christian life, *We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Co 5:7)*. Like the farmer who scatters his seed, and sleeps, confident that his seed is growing, we are confident in Christ.

With Job, we can confidently confess,
For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.
And after my skin has been thus destroyed,
yet in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see for myself,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.
My heart faints within me (19:25-27)!

Why do birds fly to trees? Birds fly to trees because trees provide shelter, protection to birds. Trees provide a safe haven for birds.

And, the words of Jesus in our Gospel this morning teach us that the kingdom of God is a safe haven for us. In this world, we often feel alone and afraid. But, in the words of our Gospel, Jesus teaches us that the Kingdom of God is a safe haven for us for today and until that day Jesus comes to take us to be with Him, where He will forever wipe all the tears from our eyes.

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