

In the name of God, who through the Word and in the Spirit creates, redeems, and sanctifies. Amen.

As most of you know by now, I love to garden. I find life and joy and rest and wonder in the patch of green things in my yard. So you can imagine that today's lessons gave me a smile when I read them.

Ezekiel gives us the image of God starting a plant from a cutting. God takes the tender, newest growth from the top of a tree, and sets that cutting into fertile soil so that it will take root and grow new shoots. God takes young growth from the solid old wood of a cedar tree and nurtures it into a new tree altogether.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus gives us two of his many parables about growing things; in the first story, the farmer goes out and sows grain, and day by day watches and tends it, not knowing quite how that tiny grain, when given soil and water, becomes the tall green stalk bearing not just one, but many grains. Jesus then speaks of scattering mustard seed, an even tinier seed than the grain; this mustard seed becomes this weedy, woody, shrubby thing so large that it becomes shelter for other living things.

We find it easier to reflect on spiritual ideas when they are translated into familiar imagery. Ezekiel is giving a message of hope to a people in exile. God is a God who can make something new and strong and fruitful out of something old Ezekiel tells them. Ezekiel shows God renewing exiled Israel, taking from what is long past and creating it anew. This renewed Israel will grow and spread nobly; Ezekiel then compares people to birds, giving a vision of a renewed reign of God in which all people of every kindred find shelter and life in this new creation. Ezekiel likens the other nations, the societies and structures around this new kingdom of God to other trees of the field, trees which recognise that this fruitful and sheltering growth can come only from God. The holy reign of this new planting spreads a Godly justice and equity, that raises up what is lowly to a place of satisfied need, and brings down what has been haughty and proud to meet the lifted lowly in an abiding peace.

Jesus reminds us that this kind of work is not God's to accomplish alone. In Jesus' parable, though the farmer may not entirely understand how God works, the farmer understands the work that a farmer must do if God is to bring about the growth and fruitful harvest. The farmer sows seed; she

does not hoard it; she does not let it go to waste; she keeps enough of previous harvests to be able to sow in hope of the next harvest. She rises every day, and rests every night, watchful, and caring of this crop of hope. She does not tend this crop only when it is convenient; she does not tend this crop only when she has finished doing everything else more interesting, or when she feels it's absolutely safe to do so. She does not sow or tend this crop only when it is guaranteed not to fail. In order for God to be able to bless her work and bring about that harvest, this farmer must sow her seed and pray for rain; dig irrigation ditches if it is too dry; dig drainage ditches if it is too wet; pluck off caterpillars, drive away weevils. The farmer knows that God expects us to work with God to bring about the fruitfulness of creation; the farmer knows that when God gives us seed to sow, our love of God demands that we sow in hope; and our faith in God assures us of harvests that will sustain us.

And going back to that tree of Ezekiel; yes, in that imagery, we see God doing a lot of work; but think of what that tree had to do and be in order to make that tender growth that God set out in new soil. That tree had to learn to withstand fierce winds, to make the most of the soil it was in, to survive drought and soak up rain, to suffer scorching sun and cold nights.

That tree had to practice living in whatever circumstances it found itself; it had to practice a way of being that could be fruitful and green in plenty and in adversity.

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” Our new creation is not a passive event; our new creation is not something that God does to us; it is our being in Christ, our abiding in God, our daily rising and going to sleep intent on cultivating our spirit and nourishing our soul that makes us co-workers with God in becoming what Jesus knew we could be when he died and rose again to transform us into divine likeness. Our being in Christ, our daily rising and going to sleep intent on cultivating our spirit and nourishing our soul is the first and essential step into bringing about the holy reign of God, a reign of justice and peace.

This co-creation with God of new life within ourselves is the day-in-day-out work of Pentecost that we return to regularly in our spiritual lives. When we take time every day to be still and pray; to be still and listen to the voice of God’s Spirit. It is the work of wrestling with these ancient words we read today, and asking what it means to us here and now. It is taking the fruit of

the prayer and listening and wrestling out into a hungry world. This day-in-day-out spiritual work is the necessary growth and tending of our relationship with God that allows us to scatter the gifts of seed we have been given so that God can grow us into the Christ-likeness that God knows will fulfill us. And this work is indispensable if the vision given by God to the prophets is ever to be achieved. Let us be confident, then, and sow in faith; let us nurture in hope; and by God's grace, harvest in the glory of being the full intention of God's creation of us. Amen.