

**11<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Cycle B)**  
**June 17, 2012 -- Deacon Bill Nourse, Ed.D.**

Today's readings are all about the power of God.

Our first reading is about the time when Zedekiah was king of Judah. He had been made king by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, and was supposed to be a puppet who would do Nebuchadnezzar's bidding. But he entered into an alliance with the Egyptian Pharaoh and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. You may remember that Jerusalem was then conquered by the Nebuchadnezzar in about 587 BC, and razed to the ground. Solomon's Temple was destroyed, and a large portion of the population was deported to Babylon. We think this is when the Ark of the Covenant was lost. Only a few people were allowed to remain in the area. Zedekiah eventually met a horrible end, too gruesome for me to talk about here.

This morning, we hear Ezekiel delivering God's rebuke to Zedekiah for breaking the covenant and refusing to follow God's plan.

But Ezekiel also speaks of better days to come for the people of Judah. The "shoot of cedar" he refers to is the remnant of Israel, cut by Nebuchadnezzar and carried to Babylon. Ezekiel prophesies that it will be returned to Zion, where it will take root and grow in the city of God, Jerusalem – and that is indeed what happened. This is just one more example among many in which God's people are saved from almost certain annihilation by the power of God.

The Gospel also speaks of the power of God – the power that God gives the seed to grow to reach full maturity . . . even a seed which is extremely small can grow into a huge tree in which all the birds of the sky can take shelter.

The message is that it's God who does this – not men. It is God who returns the shoot of cedar to Jerusalem. The sower of the seed in Jesus's parable is God, not man. It's God who makes the seed grow not man. The angels of God collect the grain, not man. Jesus wants to make clear in his hearers – and us – that the entire process of building the Kingdom among men, in history, is especially God's

work. Jesus is telling of the powerful action of God in building his Kingdom in the world.

But it's our work too. As the seed grows from seed to stem to ear to grain, the word is planted in us, takes root, blossoms and bears fruit.

Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man on earth in his time. But God is more powerful than Nebuchadnezzar. God's power shines forth and overshadows the power of men.

The tiny mustard seed becomes a leafy tree; the people of Israel, exiled in Babylon, return to Jerusalem, return to Mount Zion.

So what are we to do? Is it just to be pawns in God's game, to wait for Him to move us on the chessboard? I think it's a lot more than that. Our first task is not to be an obstacle to God's actions. It is to accept God's pace joyfully, to open our minds and hearts to it, and to do our part in taking up God's plans and helping others do the same. It is our task to aspire to please him.

It's not always easy to keep that in mind as we live in the world today. We look around us, and everywhere we see the power of men. We see political power that can be used for the good of all citizens; but we see power usurped and abused, we see power tainted with pressure, corruption, despotism, or with lust for power and control masquerading as the good of the citizens. Albert Camus put it like this:

"The welfare of the people in particular has always been the alibi of tyrants, and it provides the further advantage of giving the servants of tyranny a good conscience. . . . the very ones who make use of such alibis know they are lies; they leave to their intellectuals on duty the chore of believing in them . . . "

-- Albert Camus (1913-1960)

Everywhere we see unjust laws, power that manipulates people. We see the power of lies over truth, evil over good, superficiality over depth. We see what appears to be the power of God overshadowed by the power of men. We wonder why God doesn't act with all his

power and put human power in its proper place. Paul preaches a crucified Christ as the savior of mankind, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. But for believers, a Christ who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." God is patient, compassionate and full of mercy. Human powers are fragile, and any can be destroyed in an instant. God's power is eternal, and it is manifested in this world to those and by those who love him. Our task is not to impose the faith on others, but to transmit it, to preach it, to make it into a prayer visible to others through joy and love.

Preachers often tell that a person will come and mention what the preacher said a long time ago that deeply touched and changed the person's life. It's even happened to me a couple of times, sometimes involving things I don't even remember I said. Sometimes it even involves things I'm pretty sure I didn't say – but that's what the person heard.

Adults will often say -- "My father used to say . . ." and then quote what they heard as a child from their parent that still influences their ways of thinking and acting. We sometimes remember a teacher who touched our lives when we were young and set us on a path for life. It really gives me a sense of joy and humility when a parent of one of my students tells me about their daughter at the family dinner table, telling of something "Dr. Nourse" said today.

All these things are the fruit of tiny seeds that took root.

I went to visit Father John Atkinson a few days before he was born to eternal life. He didn't really recognize me – I'm not sure he even knew that I was there – but it seemed apparent that he'd be going home soon.

Several people had told me that Father John was getting a little frustrated in the last days of his life. He was ready to go home . . . he kept asking Jesus why he wouldn't take him. And I know how difficult it must have been for him to deal with his physical ailments when he felt that he had nothing more to do.

But the only explanation I can think of is that he did have something more to do. I don't know what it was. He apparently didn't know what it was. But he knows now. I think Cardinal Newman put it well:

“We have a purpose in this life. We may never know it in this life, but we will be told it in the next.”

So maybe that's why Jesus wouldn't take him yet, even though he was ready to go. There was something he still needed to do. Something that someone needed to hear him say. We don't know what it was. But he knows now.

On this Father's Day, we might consider that Father John was a father to us all. We might remember our own fathers, and the things we remember that they did and said, those tiny seeds they planted so long ago that took root in us, and grew, and matured, and became huge leafy trees. May God bless them all.

## READINGS

### Reading 1 Ez 17:22-24

Thus says the Lord GOD:  
I, too, will take from the crest of the cedar,  
from its topmost branches tear off a tender shoot,  
and plant it on a high and lofty mountain;  
on the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it.  
It shall put forth branches and bear fruit,  
and become a majestic cedar.  
Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it,  
every winged thing in the shade of its boughs.  
And all the trees of the field shall know  
that I, the LORD,  
bring low the high tree,  
lift high the lowly tree,  
wither up the green tree,  
and make the withered tree bloom.  
As I, the LORD, have spoken, so will I do.

### Responsorial Psalm Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

R. (cf. 2a) Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.  
It is good to give thanks to the LORD,  
to sing praise to your name, Most High,  
To proclaim your kindness at dawn  
and your faithfulness throughout the night.  
R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.  
The just one shall flourish like the palm tree,  
like a cedar of Lebanon shall he grow.  
They that are planted in the house of the LORD  
shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.  
They shall bear fruit even in old age;  
vigorous and sturdy shall they be,  
Declaring how just is the LORD,  
my rock, in whom there is no wrong.  
R. Lord, it is good to give thanks to you.

### Reading 2 2 Cor 5:6-10

Brothers and sisters:  
We are always courageous,  
although 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.  
Yet we are courageous,  
and we would rather leave the body and go home to the Lord.  
Therefore, we aspire to please him,  
whether we are at home or away.  
For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,

so that each may receive recompense,  
according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.

**Gospel**  
**Mk 4:26-34**

Jesus said to the crowds:  
"This is how it is with the kingdom of God;  
it is as if a man were to scatter seed on the land  
and would sleep and rise night and day  
and through it all the seed would sprout and grow,  
he knows not how.  
Of its own accord the land yields fruit,  
first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.  
And when the grain is ripe, he wields the sickle at once,  
for the harvest has come."

He said,  
"To what shall we compare the kingdom of God,  
or what parable can we use for it?  
It is like a mustard seed that, when it is sown in the ground,  
is the smallest of all the seeds on the earth.  
But once it is sown, it springs up and becomes the largest of plants  
and puts forth large branches,  
so that the birds of the sky can dwell in its shade."  
With many such parables  
he spoke the word to them as they were able to understand it.  
Without parables he did not speak to them,  
but to his own disciples he explained everything in private.