

Fr James' homily for the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2021



First Reading: Prophecy of Ezekiel 17:22-24
Second Reading: Second Letter of St Paul to the Corinthians 5:6-10
Gospel: Mark 4:26-34

Today once again we return to the cycle of “Ordinary” Sundays of the Year and by ordinary we mean time marked in order and counted, not time unremarkable and unimportant compared to the great feasts and seasons of the recent calendar. No Sunday is unremarkable or unimportant! Each is a renewal of the miracle of Easter. This time we mark steadily and slowly as our year continues, and should be a time to grow and mature in faith. In our tradition, this growth and fruitfulness is part of what the green colour in church represents.

There is always now an element now of a new beginning, and this year, as the pandemic we pray loses its grip on our lives we face a new reality for our parish and for the church generally: in many ways we are starting from scratch. We should not be afraid of that, for that is part of Christian discipleship - we are always starting again; always hearing again the call of the Lord Jesus to follow him, and that means down-sizing and de-cluttering as well as acquiring new virtue and fervour of faith.

So the scriptures today are filled with an image of greenery and growth in the image of trees growing and spreading - under the will of God the Father. In the Prophecy of Ezekiel we hear of God planting a shoot of a tree which will have a great destiny. Ezekiel is a wonderful but weird book, steeped in the culture and history of Israel. The rabbis used to advise students not to read Ezekiel until at least the age of fifty, to have the necessary grounding for it.

Ezekiel is a Temple priest who has gone into exile in Babylon with the first wave of the exiled. The symbols he uses describe the [political situation around him and also the age old story of worldly power waxing and waning. In the middle of all that God's power will form a different kind of kingdom.

Remember, all of scripture is there to tell us eternal truth and is always in some way or other about Jesus, and the Lord Jesus himself today speaks in the same images of growing trees to tell us a truth it is wise to take on board: that God will build his kingdom among the other kingdoms of the world, and it is good for us to choose to Be part of that kingdom.

The story in the Gospel is very simple: “what is the Kingdom of God like?” And the answer is the image of the tiny mustard seeds that grows so big. The meaning of this is

not just that from little things great things grow, true though that is. The message is to be attentive to what God is doing in Jesus - and to that we should pay attention in the Ordinary weeks of the year. Empires come and go; political powers rise and fall - but God is building a kingdom, his Church, the Body of Christ, in which every culture and people and language finds a home and peaceful shade.

When you and I are wise enough to use our time and our abilities with that “tree” - the tree of the Kingdom of God and his Church, as our focus, as our centre of gravity, then we will be growing branches, as it were, that will bring shade and life to many lives. Jesus spoke in parables because the truth, as we heard on Pentecost Sunday, would be “too much for you now”, but he invites us to work with the Holy Spirit to grow in understanding. Happy growing.

Amen.

Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch.