

## Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

### OLD TESTAMENT –Ezekiel 17:22-24

**22 Thus says the Lord GOD: “I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 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. 24 And all the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD; I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish. I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.”**

**17:22–24** A messianic prophecy spoken to a descendant of David, to whom the prophet Nathan promised an everlasting kingdom (2Sm 7). (TLSB)

**17:22** *Lord God* – This combines the image of a loving God who keeps his promises with a God who also has the wherewithal to get the job done

*says* - To speak with authority, even demand. This continues the power theme begun with the words “Sovereign Lord.”

*I myself*.† A beautiful Messianic promise follows, using the previous imagery in a prophetic way. (CSB)

The first person singular pronoun *'ani* is emphatic: “I myself” will take and plant. Though these events are concerned with the political rise and fall of nations, there is no doubt who is ultimately in control of human history. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

The kings of Israel had made a mess of things by going to Egypt for help instead of God when they went against Nebuchadnezzar. Now God would take over and get the job done right. (CC)

By the repeated, emphatic “I myself” and the contrast with the machinations of the two eagles, Yahweh puts great accent on the antithesis between his free divine action and all human activity. What he promises is not the result of some new and clever human plan, but solely a new, free act of God in faithfulness to his ancient promises. (CC)

*sprig*. A member of David’s family (cf. Isa 11:1; Zec 3:8; 6:12). (CSB)

The kingdom of God, which came in a way beyond what OT believers would know; the NT describes the fulfillment, and the Church still awaits its final fruition. (TLSB)

Unique expression but one probably ultimately derived from the common description of the Messiah as a branch or shoot (cf. Is 11:1; Jer 23:5; Zec 3:8). One could think of Jesus’ virginal birth as a tiny infant, though this may press the figure too far. (TLSB)

His weakness and vulnerability are most evident in His crucifixion. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

*the topmost of its young twigs.* As (in v 4) Nebuchadnezzar is figuratively described as breaking the top twigs (i.e., Jehoiachin, the legitimate king and of Davidic descent), so in the messianic era the Lord God will do something comparable (although on a vastly higher plane). (TLSB)

The foliage of the highest or top branches. This is the Messiah.

Isaiah 11:1 “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”

Isaiah 53:2 “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”

Jeremiah 23:5-6 “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up To David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.’”

*cedar.* A return to the original imagery of the parable. (TLSB)

As a cedar was the most renowned among the trees, so the dynasty of David was the most illustrious of their princely families. Of this ancestral tree should the Messiah spring. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

This was the most famous of trees in that area. The lumber from it was used to build palaces, temples and ship masts. It represented strength and majesty.

*Break* – To strip or crop something from a plant. (CSB)

*plant it.* Make him king (see v. 5). (CSB)

To transplant something

*high and lofty mountain.* Jerusalem. (CSB)

Cf v 24. Zion (Jerusalem) was situated on a small mountain, but this messianic abode far transcends earthly geography. Cf Ps 48:1–2; Is 11:9; 25:6–8. It can scarcely be accidental that high mountains figure so prominently in the NT (e.g., the scene of our Lord’s temptations [Mt 4:1–11], the unnamed mount of transfiguration [Mt 17:1–13], and the new Jerusalem [Rv 21:2, 10]). Ezekiel will also describe the new temple of a restored Israel on “a very high mountain” (Ezk 40:2). (TLSB)

This is from which the Davidic King would rule and is a reference to Mount Zion, the mountain on which the temple stood, and thus a reference on to the modern church. It is the place where God administers His kingdom of grace through Word and Sacrament. Through these means God “lifts up” His people to the heights of heaven. (2:2; Micah 4:1) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

**17:23** *bear branches and produce fruit* - Where there is a faith there will also be evidence of that faith in the form of spiritual fruit. (James 2:14-19) See also Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9; and Hebrews 12:11. This connects well with John 15:1-8 where Jesus talks about the Vine and the branches.

Cedars don't bear fruit. The miraculous reversal here is expressed in ultranatural terms. God is doing something unexpected and impossible. Along with the formulaic expressions at the beginning and the end of this section ("Thus says the Lord God" in v 22; "I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it" in v 24), the power and activity of God is brought to the fore. God can do whatever he wants. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

*birds of every sort will nest.* Symbolizing people of all nations. (TLSB)

Symbols of shelter, which the Lord provides to those who take refuge in His chosen servant. (TLSB)

The portrayal of the church as a place of refuge for "birds over every sort" (i.e. all people, Jew and Gentile alike; Rom 11:11-24) is affirmed by Jesus in Mark 4:32). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

**17:24** *bring low* – The theme of the "great reversal" is one of the most prominent Law/Gospel themes that span both testaments: God brings down the high and proud, but exalts the lowly; He dries up the green, but gives life and growth to those were dead. God kills with His Law in order to give resurrection life through the Gospel. The "great reversal" theme is particularly prominent in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

*bring low the high tree...make high the low tree* – The reference is to the subjugation of David's kingdom during the Babylonian captivity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

The nations will either bow in sincere faith or break in humiliation (cf Php 2:10–11). (TLSB)

The punch line of this whole chapter is a proverbial statement that sums up not only how God is working in this context but about how God works in general: "I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish." (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

If God's action brings down the high tree and makes the low tree high, the theological question for the hearer is, am I a high or low tree? This verse is both Law and Gospel: which one applies to me? External evidence is no sure sign because God is often working in hidden ways. We can only understand ourselves and our hearers as the low, dry tree that is being made high and green because we have other promises from God: "I baptize you in the name" (LSB, p. 270), "shed for the forgiveness of your sins" (LSB, p. 164), "I . . . announce the grace of God unto all of you" (LSB, p. 185), for example. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 19, Part 3)

Christ and the sinner changing places, as it were, so that none may boast but confess that it was all pure grace (cf Lk 1:46–55; 1Co 1–2). (TLSB)

*green tree* – This represents the splendor of David's kingdom. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

*dry tree flourish* – That the promised Messiah came from this now-low and now-dry tree identified by Isaiah (11:1) as a "stump," underscores God's grace and power. God creates from nothing, and give growth to that which is dead. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

*I am the Lord, I have spoken and I will do it* – No matter how much we have left Him out of our lives, He is never far away. Just the opposite. His love and His promises remove the sin, lives and hearts. We are not so unlike the people of 2500 years ago. Like them we tend to follow our sinful desires.

Human nature doesn't change. The good news is that God hasn't changed either! His love is everlasting. (PBC)

**Ch 17** An allegory describes Nebuchadnezzar's placement of Zedekiah over Jerusalem and the deportation of the rightful king, Jehoiachin. Ezekiel builds a glorious picture of God establishing His eternal kingdom in a descendant of David (and Jehoiachin): the Messiah. Ezekiel also describes how God makes a new creation for you, established through Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection. • Lord, avert our eyes of faith from the kingdom of this world with its politics and power struggles. Show us the kingdom of heaven that You have already established. Sustain us on our journey to the high mountain above. Amen. (TLSB)

### EPISTLE – 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

**For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.**

**5:1 for** – In the Greek it is “gar” and “for” in English. It suggests a looking ahead and anticipating great things in the future.

Paul changes the picture, broadening it somewhat, but he is still talking about the same subject. He has been using the illustration of jars of clay to picture the outer man. He switches now to the picture of a tent that has been set up here on earth. (PBC)

*know* – eido To be aware of through sight or perception; to understand and have full confidence based on what we know. Also used in 2 Corinthians 4:14. Other passages that echo this are below. (QV)

Job 19:25 “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.”

John 4:41-42 “And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, “We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.”

Romans 8:28 “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”

2 Timothy 1:12 “That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”

1 John 3:2 “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears.”

1 John 3:14 “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.”

*tent that is our earthly home.* Our present body (see 2Pe 1:13). As a tent is a temporary and flimsy abode, so our bodies are frail, vulnerable and wasting away (4:10–12, 16). (CSB)

The temporal body. (TLSB)

skanous – The earthly house of the tent. Paul sees the death and life of Jesus (2 Cor 4:10-11) already at work, transforming the people of God by the power and grace of his Spirit, anticipating the final resurrection. Second Peter 1:13-14 has a similar word which describes our body as temporary, insecure, and transient. The figure of a tent also suggests a comparison to God’s OT people who lived in tents while traveling in the wilderness before they reached the Promised Land. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

*destroyed* – katalutha – To dismantle. Paul is so sure of this future change that he expresses it in the present tense: “we have” this spiritual body waiting. Furthermore, he does not just say that we hope or believe, but that “we know” of the pending change. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

*a building from God...eternal in the heavens.* A solid structure—permanent, not temporary. This is one of the eternal realities that are as yet unseen (4:18). (CSB)

A permanent dwelling. The resurrected body is redeemed for eternity, restored and transformed by God Himself (cf 1Co 15; 1Jn 3:2). (TLSB)

Something that goes on forever. A house is not something you assemble and tear down each day like a tent. It also gives much more protection in bad weather. Some glimpses of heaven follow in the verses below.

He does not use here the Greek word that means knowing by personal experience, for he has not yet left this tent-house for the eternal house in heaven. Paul knows, he is certain, that an eternal house in heaven awaits him because that is what God has said. So true and certain, in fact is this promise of God that Paul can use a present tense verb, “we have a building from God,” even though he has not yet left the tent-house of his earthly existence. That is how reliable God’s promises are. If God says it, God’s children have it. (PBC)

Matthew 6:19-20 ““Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal”

Luke 10:20 “However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

John 14:1-3 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 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. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Acts 7:55 “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”

Hebrews 11:10 “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”

Revelation 7:9 “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”

*not made with hands.* The work of God, and therefore perfect and permanent (see Heb 9:11). (CSB)

*acheiro – poiaton* – To indicate its divine and heavenly workmanship. It is not of this creation but supernatural, spiritual, and of eternal durability. It is significant that Christ uses this word-pair to describe the handmade Jerusalem temple, which would be torn down, and his own body, which would also be “torn down” but then raised again as an eternal temple not made by human hands (Mk 14:58; cf. also Acts 7:48; Heb 9:11, 24) Our bodies too are temples of God (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). Like the Jerusalem temple in Christ’s prophecy, our bodies will be “torn down:” and replaced with lasting temples similar to Christ’s resurrection body. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

**5:2** *for this.* As we await the Lord’s return. (CSB)

*we groan.* Because we long for the perfection that will be ours when we put on the glorious spiritual body (cf. 1Co 15:42–49). (CSB)

*stenazo* To be in dire straits and sighing for something much better. We know how sin negatively impacts our life on this side of heaven and long for heaven where these imperfections will not trouble us. (QV)

*stenazo* – We groan because of the hardship of this present life. It is repeated in verse 4. In Romans 8:23 Paul uses it to describe the groans of those who desire to be free from the afflictions and imperfections of this present life and to be clothed in a glorious, spiritual body. The present tense indicates daily groaning. The suffering that causes our groaning does have a positive benefit in that it increases our longing hope for our heavenly dwelling. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

*clothed with our heavenly dwelling.* The eternal dwelling provided by God is pictured as something the Christian puts on like a garment. (CSB)

*ependuomai* To be invested in something. In this case it is God who invested in us and has clothed us in a robe of righteousness as the verses below indicate. (QV)

ependumai – Meaning to put on. It is also used in 1 Cor. 15:53-54. This cloting metaphor is also used for the rich concepts of being clothes with Christ (Rom 13:14; Gal 3:27), being clothed with power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 24:49), putting on the new man (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10), and putting on various Christian virtues (Col. 3:12). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

Job 29:14 “I put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe and my turban.”

Isaiah 61:10 “I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.”

Zechariah 3:4 ” The angel said to those who were standing before him, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.”

Luke 15:22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’”

**5:3** At the point of death, when the tent dwelling literally fades away, the cloak of God’s eternal dwelling is sure for all those who trust in Him. (TLSB)

*naked.* Without the clothing of a body, which is the state of those whose earthly tent-dwelling has been dismantled by death (see note on v. 8). (CSB)

After death, Christians “will not be found naked” since we will not forever remain disembodied spirits. At Christ’s return we will be clothed with our resurrected bodies. Rev 6:9-11 seems to describe the spirits of the departed faithful as longing for that final clothing. In the interim they are not naked, but are clothed with the white robes until they receive their resurrection bodies. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

**5:4** *burdened.* Knowing that the eternal is yet to come, this temporal existence feels burdensome. (TLSB)

*be unclothed* – This is so because physical death is still painful. Paul is also repudiating Platonic philosophy, which had permeated much contemporary thought in his day, and which has affected our modern culture too. Plato taught that the body was a prison, and his goal was to free the soul from the confines of the body so it could join the realm of the pure and the ideal. This same basic idea has been responsible for Gnosticism, asceticism, hedonism, and other abuses of the body. The body itself is not the problem; it is human sin which has subjected the body and all the rest of God’s originally good creation to decay and death. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

*what is mortal.* Our present mortal body. (CSB)

*swallowed up by life.* By our participation in the resurrection life of Jesus (4:10) our mortal being is swallowed up by life, not by death. Paul reverses the age-old imagery of death and the grave being the great swallower (see Ps 69:15; Pr 1:12), as did Isaiah (see Isa 25:8; see also 1Co 15:54). (CSB)

Paul does not wish to do away with his temporal existence, for God has His purposes for all things. Rather, he earnestly prays that God swallow up his mortality with Christlike immortality in His time (cf 1Jn 3:2; 1Co 15:38, 44–47, 52–54). Irenaeus of Lyons: “We ought, after our calling, to be also adorned with works of righteousness, so that the Spirit of God may rest upon us; for this is the wedding garment” (ANF 1:517). (TLSB)

katapino This definition of swallow means to drink down in gulping fashion or to literally devour. The phrase is saying that eternal life is so strong that it simply overpowers anything in its way including earthly situations. (QV)

Here is a reversal of imagery. Instead of death and the grave swallowing their victims (Is.5:14; and Hab 2:5), Paul pictures life through Christ as the great swallower and victor, as also in 1 Cor. 15:54-57. (CSB)

**5:5** *he...for this very thing* – In the word order of the Greek text the name of God is put into an emphatic position. So here: “It is God who has made us for this very purpose.” For what purpose? For that which Paul has stated in the previous verse: To be “clothed with our heavenly dwelling so that death may be swallowed up by life.” (PBC)

Only God could make this possible. This He has done by clothing Paul with Jesus’ righteousness, a righteousness earned for Paul by Christ through His perfect life and sacrificial death in his place. (PBC)

*God ... has given us the Spirit.*† The Holy Spirit, poured out by the risen and exalted Savior, applies by word and sacrament the benefits of Christ’s redeeming work to the believer’s heart and makes the resurrection power of Jesus a reality of his daily experience (cf. 4:14, 16). This guarantees his eventual total transformation into the likeness of Christ’s glorified body (Php 3:21). (CSB)

*guarantee.* A down payment or pledge assures that the whole is certain to come. (TLSB)

arrabona – Earnest money. The first installment or down payment that promises the remainder.

The word was used by Greek businessmen as the equivalent of our English “down payment,” of “deposit.” It was the first settlement of a total amount due and thus served as a pledge of more to come. (PBC)

Paul’s point is this: The presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is God’s personal guarantee of more to come. The gift of the Holy Spirit is God’s pledge that one day what is mortal, our earthly life, will be swallowed up by life, the eternal life that never ends. (PBC)

How does one know if he or she has been given the Spirit? To rely on feelings is not an accurate gauge, since feelings fluctuate. One day a person may feel that he has the Spirit; another day that feeling may not be there. It is far wiser to rely on the never-fluctuating promises of God. God’s Word says that if you have been baptized, you have received the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38). God’s Word also says that if the confession of your heart is “Jesus is Lord,” you have received the Holy Spirit, for you cannot have made such a confession apart from the working of the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). (PBC)

**5:6** *so* - Means now then. Usually when therefore is used it signals a change in emphasis. In this case it has to do with how we live while we look forward to eternal life.

*We know while we are at home* – tharrountes – Meaning to be of good cheer. This word makes the entire verse in Greek a dependent clause introducing the main clauses with finite verbs in verses 7-8. The



longing for the future gives confident joy in the present. Because Christians know that God will furnish a body not made with human hands, we rejoice today in spite of afflictions. We will not lose heart. We are filled with courage. We are confident as we journey through life's conflicts because we know God is leading us from this temporary habitation to our eternal home. As with verse 1, we are like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness on our way to our true home of permanent rest. For Christians as sojourners in this world, cf. Heb 11:13-16; James 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

*at home in the body ... away from the Lord.* Still living here in our earthly tent-dwelling (v. 1); it does not mean that we are deprived of the Lord's spiritual presence with us in our daily pilgrimage. (CSB)

Christ is always with His people (Mt 18:20; 28:20). Here, Paul means away from the permanent, eternal reality of the new heavens and the new earth with the Lord (2Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1-7, 22-23). (TLSB)

**5:7** We trust in God's promises, not in what we see with our eyes. Augustine: "Whoever takes another meaning out of Scripture than the writer intended, goes astray.... Faith will totter if the authority of Scripture begin[s] to shake. And then, if faith totter[s], love itself will grow cold. For if a man has fallen from faith, he must necessarily also fall from love; for he cannot love what he does not believe to exist" (NPNF 1 2:533). (TLSB)

*walk by faith – pistis* To be convinced that something not even visible will be true such as trusting Jesus for our salvation. (QV)

While we go about our daily walk in life, we do not see the future with 20/20 vision, but we have 20/20 faith. This verse summarizes the theology of the cross versus the theology of glory. The confidence and hope that is the content of this text is based entirely on faith, none of it can be perceived by sight now. Even though Paul was an eyewitness of the risen Christ, he too had to walk by faith, not sight. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

**5:8** *away from the body ... at home with the Lord.* † The situation of the Christian after death, when he is no longer living in his "earthly tent" (i.e., his body) but is in the immediate presence of the Lord. (CSB)

Death divides body from spirit but not from the Lord. (TLSB)

Christians look forward to their life with Christ. Paul says it well in Philippians 1:21 "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (CSB)

If it is a blessed experience to be able to live now by faith, how much more blessed will it be to live forever then by sight. The apostle John expresses this thought in his First Epistle: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). (PBC)

**5:9** *our aim.* This is something you strive for with all the energy you can generate. (QV)

*please Him.* In view of Jesus' great mercy to us, the goal of this life is to live to honor to Him (cf Rm 12:1) as we serve others in His name. (TLSB)

philotimoumetha – To be ambitious or zealous for a cause. We should always make it our aim to please God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 2, Part 4)

1 Thessalonians 4:11 “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you.”

The Christian life is not a matter of rules and regulations. It is rather a joyful response to the gospel that frees and gives life, a response that says, “Lord, I am available. Use me, in life and in death, in such a way that Jesus is praised.” (PBC)

*rather be away from the body and home with the Lord.* Whether we will be alive or will have already died at his coming. (CSB)

**5:10** *appear before the judgment seat of Christ.* This accounting has nothing to do with justification, which is credited to the Christian fully and forever through faith in Christ; instead, it refers to what we have done with our lives as Christians (cf. 1Co 3:11–15). (CSB)

At the final judgment, Jesus will personally judge the living and the dead (Ac 17:31; 2Tm 4:1). This is the day of the Lord, when all people will stand before His throne (1Co 1:8; 2Co 1:14; 2Pt 3:10). (TLSB)

*may receive what is due* – Not works-righteousness, for all are dead in sin without Christ and saved by grace alone (Eph 2:8–9; Rm 2:11–16; 3:9–20). Paul means what is due by faith, namely, that we are righteous through Christ alone, for God works through us (Eph 2:10). God’s grace is so abundant that even the works He graciously provides, He rewards. Conversely, those who do not believe in Jesus will stand before Christ and be judged by their works. “By God’s help, we will retain this Confession to our last breath, when we shall go forth from this life to the heavenly fatherland, to appear with a joyful, undaunted mind and a pure conscience before the court of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Preface to the Christian Book of Concord, *Concordia*, 16). (TLSB)

*has done in the body.* Although the body is wasting away, we are responsible for our actions while in it. Non-Christians, too, are morally responsible and liable to God’s judgment (see Ro 2:5, 16), but Paul has believers in mind here. (CSB)

At the judgment seat of Christ one will receive either good or bad, not because of, but in accordance with what he has done in the body. The cause of eternal life is not one’s works, but the Christ before whose judgment seat we will stand. (PBC)

**5:1–10** Paul simply instructs the believer to please God. We, even as Christians, often live to please others and to please ourselves, neglecting the one thing that makes life worth living—pleasing Christ. Paul calls us to get our priorities straight. To please Christ is to trust in His word of grace for us. His grace, His forgiveness, His gift of faith by the power of the Holy Spirit assures us that nothing in this world can separate us from God, and that Judgment Day will be a day of celebration for those who put their trust in Him. • Dear Lord, impress upon my heart the greatness of Your grace to me, by the power of Your Holy Spirit, so that I can walk confidently by faith until I see You gloriously face-to-face. Amen. (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Mark 4:26-34

**26 And he said, “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground. 27 He sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows; he knows not how. 28 The earth produces by itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.”**

**4:26-34** The three parables in Mark 4—the sower, the mystery of the growing seed, and the mustard seed—have one truth in common: the Word of God is like seed in that it contains his all-sufficient power to create and grow his kingdom. The three parables cast interpretive light on each other. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Vv 1–8 list four ways the Word may be received. Vv 26–29 illustrate the mysterious process of the Word giving spiritual growth in the hearts of hearers. Vv 30–32 contrast the initially “small” or weak appearance of the Word with its amazing ability to produce the largest and most important kingdom in all the world: the church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

The *Gospel* contains two parables, both dealing with seed and growth, but each with its own emphasis. The first parable (of the growing seed) is unique to Mark and emphasizes the inevitability of the seed’s growth. The second parable (of the mustard seed) emphasizes the reversal theme of “smallest to largest.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

The parable of the seed growing secretly, also known as the parable of the patient husbandman (vv 26–29): A variety of interpretations have been offered for this parable (which is recorded only in Mark). Some emphasize the growth of the kingdom, while others emphasize its present hiddenness. Some point to the farmer’s patience, some draw attention to his lack of responsibility for the seed’s automatic growth, and others stress his confidence in the harvest. Whichever aspect of the parable is emphasized, this text can bring comfort and confidence to its hearers as they await the harvest. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

Note: Some divide our text into three major paragraphs. The first two paragraphs each contain an individual parable. The third paragraph speaks in general of Jesus' use of parables. (Buls)

Verses 26-29 are found only in Mark. We cannot agree that this parable is Mark's version of Matthew's parable of the tare and wheat found in Matthew 13:24-30. If Luke knew Mark's Gospel or, more importantly, used it to write his Gospel, why did he not include this exquisite parable? (Buls)

*Interpreter's Bible* says: "Both Matthew and Luke omit the first one (26-29) -- Matthew substitutes for it his parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-30) -- but it can scarcely be thought that it was not in their edition of Mark. Perhaps they stumbled at the word "*of itself*", as if the kingdom spread by some automatic or physical principle, apart from the will of God or the response of men." The parable of the tares is wholly different from this parable. That is a poor argument. (Buls)

And to say that Matthew and Luke stumbled at what Mark wrote is even worse. These *Notes* do not say that Matthew and Luke did not know Mark's Gospel or that they did not use Mark's Gospel. But this business of "rewriting" or eliminating false ideas shows the utter weakness of the argument of Markan Priority in the sense that Matthew and Luke used and embellished Mark. Markan Priority is still only a theory fraught with real problems. Stick to 2 Timothy 3:16. (Buls)

**4:26–29** Only Mark records this parable. Whereas the Parable of the Sower stresses the importance of proper soil for the growth of seed and the success of the harvest, here the mysterious power of the seed itself is emphasized. The gospel message contains its own power. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

Although this parable and the one in vv 1–20 both involve the sowing of seed and its growth, this one makes a different point. (TLSB)

**4:26-27** The kingdom of God in both parables is not his kingdom of power (Ps 103:19), nor his kingdom of glory (2 Tim 4:18), but his kingdom of grace, governed by the Gospel. Both our growth in grace and the spread of the Word are outlined well in Luther’s Large Catechism, on the petition “Thy Kingdom Come” (LC III, 52): (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

“We pray here at the outset that all this may be realized in us and that God’s name may be praised through his holy Word and our Christian lives. This we ask, both in order that we who have accepted it may remain faithful and grow daily in it, and in order that it may gain recognition and followers among other people and advance with power throughout the world. So we pray that, led by the Holy Spirit, many may come into the kingdom of grace and become partakers of salvation, so that we may all remain together in this kingdom which has now made its appearance among us.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

In the gospels, Jesus clearly is God’s sower—the one who is broadcasting God’s Word, including the parables. Yet Christ also calls and sends out first the twelve apostles (Mk 6:6–13), and then also the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10:1–12). So when v 27 of our text says that the sower does not know how the seed sprouts and grows, the reference probably is to Christ’s ministers. R. C. Trench (*Notes on the Parables of Our Lord* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948] 99–100) concludes that the sower is Christ, though not exclusively, since “he does not know how” applies to teachers in the church. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

R. C. H. Lenski (*The Interpretation of Mark’s Gospel* [Columbus: Wartburg, 1946] 186) also writes that Christ is the sower—at great length. He argues this way: “The heavenly sower neither sleeps or slumbers (Ps 121:4), for him there is no night and day, and he who gave the Word certainly knows all about the mysteries of its development in our hearts. What Jesus does in the parable is to compare himself to a man who scatters his seed and trusts that seed to grow of its own power, etc.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Commentators agree that one should not literalistically interpret every detail, or, as Chrysostom puts it, “press too anxiously all the circumstances of a parable” (quoted in Trench, p. 15). For example, the sower in the parable remains active until the time of the harvest. This should not be pressed to imply that Christ’s return must occur in the lifetime of the original 12 apostles; but it may suggest that Christ will continue to work through his ministers in succession until his return. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

**4:26 kingdom of God** – Luke 17:20-21 explains it this way, “Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,<sup>21</sup> nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is within you.”

Here the kingdom of God is compared to growing seed. The mysterious power of the seed itself is emphasized. The Gospel message contains its own power. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

Koehler states, "It is the rule of Christ in the hearts of his believers. For the individual the Kingdom of God consists in his personal relation to Christ, established by faith, by which he trusts in the grace of his Savior and renders joyful service to his Lord."

Luther says, Lord's Prayer *Thy kingdom come*, What does this mean? The kingdom of God comes indeed without our prayer, of itself; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also. How is this done? The kingdom of God comes to us when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity.

Here Jesus introduces a particular parable. Compare verse 30. We have direct discourse. (Buls)

Jesus is here speaking about the Kingdom of God. He is describing one characteristic of that Kingdom. Here it is the power inherent in the Gospel to grow until the time of harvest, the end of this age. We say "inherent" because man cannot assist the Gospel. (Buls)

"Of God" has been called possessive, subjective and adjectival genitive. It is all three of these and it is difficult to decide which one is predominant. (Buls)

Note that five verbs in the subjunctive mood appear in verses 26 and 27. The first is aorist to distinguish the sowing in 26 from the growing in 27. (Buls)

Luke 8:11 tells us: "The seed is the Word of God." The point of comparison is the life-giving element. That is implied in Mark 4:26. (Buls)

*a man – anthrōpos*, "a man." While some believe this man corresponds to Christ, the statement (v 27) that he does not know how the seed grows is problematic for this interpretation. Though God is responsible for the planting, growth, and harvest, he works in his kingdom of grace through human instruments (1 Cor 3:5–10). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

*seed – Gospel*

Whenever Christ speaks about the kingdom of God, His ruling activity, His words always have something to do with the seed, the gospel that brings men to faith in Christ Jesus. Here Jesus speaks of the power and reliability of the gospel message. All that need be done in fact, all that can be done, is to sow the seed, to proclaim the word. A farmer who plants the seed does not understand how it grows. The power is in the seed. So it is with the gospel. (PBC)

Isaiah 55:11, "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

**4:27 GROWS THOUGH HE DOES NOT KNOW HOW** – The sprouting is absolutely unaided by man and incomprehensible to man. "Know how" is used of inherent knowledge. The truth found here is axiomatic. People soon learn that the sprouting of seed cannot be hurried nor is its growth comprehensible to man. That's the way it is with the Gospel. (Buls)

Although the farmer plays an important role in the cultivation of his field – after all, he sows the seed – its growth occurs apart from his efforts, even as he sleeps. Even today, many aspects of horticulture remain a mystery. The more one studies nature, the more one marvels at its intricacy, as well as the wisdom and power of its Lord. (TLSB)

1 Peter 2:2 “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

2 Peter 3:18 “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”

**4:28-29** How the lowly seed sprouts and grows until the grain is ripe, ready to be harvested, is God’s miracle. So also is it beyond human comprehension how the Word of God creates and nurtures faith and other characteristics of the Christian (Rom 1:16, 10:17; Eph 4:13–16; 2 Pet 3:18). So the job of the minister is to freely disseminate the Gospel without modifying God’s Word to suit his own limited understanding. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

Does the harvest refer to each believer’s time of departure? Or does it mean Judgment Day itself? The latter is probably meant, in harmony with the parables of the wheat and the tares (Mt 13:40–43) and the sheep and goats (Mt 25:31–46). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

**4:28** *by itself* – Here the emphasis is on the inevitability of the seed’s growth. The Greek word here is *automata*, from which we get our English word *automatic*. But the automatic growth of the seed is not due to blind and impersonal determinism. It is rather the work of God Himself. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

"All by itself" is found only here and Acts 12:10 in the New Testament. We use an adverb or adverbial phrase where the Greek uses an adjective. This verse does not mean that the earth PRODUCES life. The point is that man cannot understand how seed germinates and grows. Nor can he understand how the Word can cause conversion and sanctification. (Buls)

The earth does not actually produce growth “by itself.” The plant owes its growth to the power of God, who both creates and sustains order (cf. v 26). Growth in the Kingdom is similarly the result of God’s Word and Spirit, not the speaker or hearer (Rom 10:17). (TLSB)

Here the emphasis is on the *inevitability* of the seed’s growth. The Greek word here is *automatē*, from which we get our English word *automatic*. But the automatic growth of the seed is not due to a blind and impersonal determinism. It is rather the work of God himself. Mention of “the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel” introduces the idea of gradual growth through stages. But this is a minor emphasis. The major emphasis is on the inevitability of growth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

*automatē*, “by itself.” The grain is produced automatically, or without a visible cause. This points to the life being present in the seed and its growth not being attributable to human effort. Man is not in control of the growth and does not bring about the harvest. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

The parable of the mustard seed (vv 30–32): Synoptic parallels can be found in Mt 13:31–32 and Lk 13:18–19. Interpreters generally emphasize the kingdom’s growth, its present hiddenness, or the assured greatness of its final state. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

1 Corinthians 3:6, 7, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

*blade...ear...full grain* – This illustrates that any kind of growth including spiritual maturity goes through various stages. But this is a minor emphasis. The major emphasis is on the inevitability of growth. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

"First the stalk, then the head, the finally the mature grain in the head." The point is that the plant passes imperceptibly from one stage to another in a way which causes us to marvel. Likewise with the growth which the Gospel produces. (Buls)

**4:29** *he puts in the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.* A possible allusion to Joel 3:13, where harvest is a figure for the consummation of God's kingdom. (CSB)

This image is frequently used to describe judgment at the end of time (cf. Is 17:5; Rev 14:14-19). By concluding this parable with a reference to the final judgment, Jesus underscores the idea that the Kingdom is moving toward a goal. (TLSB)

This sentence is a conditional relative clause on the analogy of the present general condition. This is always what happens. The Greek-English Lexicon says: "When the condition of the crop permits." Whenever the growth, in the estimation of the one who sowed it, is mature, he harvests immediately. (Buls)

The Kingdom of God in this parable means the mysterious power of the preaching of the Gospel from the time of preaching until entry into heaven. These verses tell us that the Gospel, like seed, generates spiritual life and causes spiritual growth not only in individuals but also in groups in a way that is incomprehensible to man. This parable should cause us to preach the Gospel faithfully, without worry, and in all patience. (Buls)

**4:26–29** God's kingdom grows mysteriously of itself, at its own pace, and through the power of the Word. This reality often causes frustration among those who eagerly long for a rapid expansion of the Kingdom, and all the more as we only have a short-term view of things. But God's kingdom grows according to His plan and timetable. And it is a great blessing that things ultimately depend on Him and not us, for only He is able to bring home a great harvest for life eternal. • Lord, as You have begun a good work by planting Your kingdom in our world, bring it to a full harvest in Your own good time. Amen. (TLSB)

### *The Parable of the Mustard Seed*

**30** And he said, **“With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? 31 It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, 32 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.” 33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. 34 He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything.**

**4:30–34** The main point of this parable is that the kingdom of God seemingly had insignificant beginnings. It was introduced by the despised and rejected Jesus and his 12 unimpressive disciples. But a day will come when its true greatness and power will be seen by all the world. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 10, Part 3)

The mustard seed is the smallest of the kinds of seeds usually planted in ancient gardens, even if there are wild plants with smaller seeds (Lenski, p. 193). While the seed is the Word of God in the other parables as well as in 1 Cor 3:6 and especially 1 Pet 1:23, since Christ is the Word incarnate, the mustard seed may be seen as Christ himself (so Trench, p. 40; Lenski, p. 193). The size of the seed has no bearing on the size of the plant that will grow from it. The tallest tree in the world, the California redwood, grows from a very small seed. The large seed of a watermelon will produce only a low vine. The Gospel of the crucified

Christ is considered by the world to be foolishness and weakness, but it is the power of God for salvation (cf. 1 Cor 1:18–25). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

The tremendous growth of the church is compared with the largest of garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in shade; The rabbis sometimes understood the similar image of the growing cedar tree in Ezek 17:22–24 (v 23: “birds of every kind will nest in it”) to mean the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s kingdom (A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting the Parables* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960] 44). The Ezekiel passage is a prophecy that the Gospel will incorporate some from all nations into Christ. We are reminded of our Lord’s prediction in Mt 24:14 and his commission in Mt 28:19. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 7, Part 3)

**4:30-32** The second parable compares the smallness of the Kingdom’s origins with the largeness of the Kingdom itself. It is this contrast between the smallest and the largest that serves as the title for today’s sermon. The seemingly insignificant beginnings of the Kingdom in the seed of God’s Word will someday emerge into a great Kingdom that will be seen by all. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

**4:30** *kingdom of God is like* – Only record of this phrase in Mark (cf. Matt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2; 25:1). (TLSB)

Jesus answers His own question in verse 31. (Buls)

**4:31** *mustard seed* – Proverbial in rabbinical teaching for its smallness (cf. Mt. 17:20). Technically a hyperbole, since the mustard seed is not actually the smallest seed known. (TLSB)

"Plant" occurs twice, once in this verse and once in the next verse. In 31 "plant" lays stress on the time of sowing, but in 32 it lays stress on the sowing itself. (Buls)

At the time of sowing the mustard seed is the smallest seed. Jesus is speaking of seeds ordinarily planted in His day. He has been criticized because botanists know of seeds smaller than the mustard seed. Jesus is not giving a lesson in botany. He is making a point which becomes apparent in the next verse. (Buls)

Using this small seeds helps to illustrate what God can do with very little or in the case of creation, nothing. Another example of something growing to huge proportions from a very small seed is the California redwood. In the spiritual realm this points to the fact that anything is going to get done it is only by God’s power and not anything human being can do.

*kokkōi sinapeōs*, “mustard seed.” The mustard plant is a fitting choice for this parable due to the proverbial smallness of its seed and the great contrast to its final size. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

It also has been suggested that Jesus’ choice of the mustard seed might have served to correct a common misunderstanding regarding the nature of the kingdom of God. By portraying the kingdom as a mustard plant—which typically reaches only 3–4 feet in height (though it can grow as tall as 15 feet), and which many considered a nuisance and an undesirable plant—this parable might have served as corrective to those who mistakenly believed the Church would manifest the outward might and stateliness of the cedar tree prophesied in the Old Testament Reading. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 16, Part 3)

**4:32** *larger plants* – One variety of mustard (*sinapis nigra*) can reach a mature height of 10 feet, making it the largest plant in an herb garden. (TLSB)



*birds* – In contrast to v. 15, here the birds represent people of every nation. It alludes to a prophecy comparing the Messiah's rule to a great tree in whose shadow "birds of every sort will nest" (Ezk 17:23). (TLSB)

In verse 31 stress was laid on the size of the mustard seed at the time of planting. Verse 32 lays stress on what happens to the seed after it's been planted. (Buls)

This is what always happens, human experience corroborates it, and people easily understand it. It grows up, it becomes, it produces. (Buls)

"Garden plants" is variously translated "shrubs, plants, garden plants." Not "trees" but tree-like enough to have large branches. (Buls)

In verses 30-32 Jesus is describing the mysterious growth and spread of the Gospel from small beginnings to vast proportions, bringing blessings even to unbelievers. The church began with twelve apostles. Now there are many millions of Christians. (Buls)

**4:33-34** Parables in the teaching ministry of Jesus stimulated thinking and illustrated spiritual truths. Quite often Jesus ended up explaining the parables to his own disciples. Parables illustrate that growth, including growth in understanding the Kingdom, is a gradual process rather than an instantaneous event. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 10, Part 3)

Verses 33-34 are a summary statement of Jesus' constant use of parables. People like illustrations. They stick in people's minds. "By means of such parables, many of them, He customarily spoke to them." (Buls)

"Them" is all those who heard Him preach. "The word" means primarily the Gospel. Both of the parables noted here deal with spiritual growth. The Law cannot make alive or cause growth. Only the Gospel can do that. (Buls)

Christ preached no more and no less than they could hear. His hearers' benefit was His total concern. Use Him as your model. (Buls)

Jesus was practicing what He preached. He sowed the seed of the Word and explained further to His disciples so that the seed could bring forth spiritual life either in justification or sanctification. (Buls)

**4:34** *He did speak to them without using a parable.* Jesus used parables to illustrate truths, stimulate thinking and awaken spiritual perception. The people in general were not ready for the full truth of the gospel. When alone with his disciples Jesus taught more specifically, but even they usually needed to have things explained. (CSB)

Jesus did not make His teaching confusing. Rather it was the people's preconceptions that made His teaching seem hard. (TLSB)

This does not mean that Jesus taught exclusively by parables but that parables constantly were being used. This was His customary action. (Buls)

There is much comfort for us in verses 33-34. Jesus fits the preaching of the Gospel to our ability to hear it. And He is very patient in explaining what His Word means. (Buls)

Lenski limits the sower in verse 26 to Christ. This causes difficulties. He also identifies "mustard seed," in verse 36 with Christ. (Buls)

With reference to this text Kretzmann quotes a worthwhile passage from Luther concerning the fact that Mark 4:33 does not contradict Matthew 13:13-14. (Buls)

From verses 33-34 the faithful preacher can learn much as to attitude and teaching methods. (Buls)

Pertinent Parallel Passages:

- A. Is. 55:10-11 -- The Gospel is never preached in vain. God promises that it will accomplish its purpose.
- B. 1 Corinthians 3:6-7 -- We plant and water but only God can make the Word grow.
- C. Ezekiel 17:22-24 -- Perhaps Jesus had this passage in mind when He spoke Mark 4:32.
- D. Luke 8:11 -- The Gospel causes spiritual life both in justification and sanctification.
- E. James 1:18 -- The Gospel caused our conversion.
- F. 1 Peter 1:23 and 25 -- God's ever-living Word caused our conversion.
- G. James 5:7 -- Like the farmer, wait patiently for the crop.

**4:30–34** Jesus' parables reassure believers that over time the kingdom of God will grow incredibly large, far beyond its unassuming beginnings. Precisely because the Kingdom grows so slowly and its Lord is so patient, believers tend to become discouraged and its enemies are emboldened. But in the end, the Kingdom alone will stand, and everything else will be overthrown. Thank God, He shelters His people of every nation in its eternal shade. • Lord, let us see both in fact and by faith that Your kingdom will someday be all in all. Keep us ever sheltered safely within its branches. Amen. (TLSB)