

Notes for Next Sunday

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Ezekiel 17:22-24). 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.

Epistle (2 Corinthians 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.

Gospel (Mark 4:26-34). 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. Jesus' parables reassure believers that over time the kingdom of God will grow incredibly large, far beyond its unassuming beginnings.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT –Ezekiel 17:22-24

22“**This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain.** **23** **On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches.** **24** **All the trees of the field will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.**”**I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.”**

17:22 Sovereign Lord. 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.

17:22 shoot. 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)

17:23 produce branches and bear fruit. Where there is a faith there will also be evidence of that faith in the form of spiritual fruit.

17:23 every kind of bird. Symbolizing people of all nations. (TLSB)

17:23 Birds ... will nest in it. Symbols of shelter, which the Lord provides to those who take refuge in His chosen servant. (TLSB)

17:24 the tall tree. 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)

EPISTLE – 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ²Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. ⁶Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷We live by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

5:1 earthly tent we live in. Our present body. As a tent is a temporary and flimsy abode, so our bodies are frail, vulnerable and wasting away. (CSB)

5:1 a building from God, an eternal house in heaven. A permanent dwelling. The resurrected body is redeemed for eternity, restored and transformed by God Himself. (TLSB)

5:2 we groan. 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)

5:4 swallowed up by life. By our participation in the resurrection life of Jesus 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. (CSB)

5:5 guarantee. A down payment or pledge assures that the whole is certain to come. (TLSB)

5:6 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)

5:10 may receive what is due him. Not works-righteousness, for all are dead in sin without Christ and saved by grace alone. Paul means what is due by faith, namely, that we are righteous through Christ alone, for God works through us. God’s grace is so abundant that even the works He graciously provides, He rewards. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Mark 4:26-34

²⁶ He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. ²⁷ Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. ²⁸ All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. ²⁹ As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.” ³⁰ Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? ³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. ³² Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade.” ³³ With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. ³⁴ He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.

4:1–8 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)

4:27 *grows though he does not know how*. Just as a farmer doesn’t really know what all takes place when a seed is growing in the ground, so God’s workers don’t often know what is happening with the Gospel they have shared.

4:29 *he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come*. This image is frequently used to describe judgment at the end of time. By concluding this parable with a reference to the final judgment, Jesus underscores the idea that the Kingdom is moving toward a goal. (TLSB)

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)

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)

4:34 *He did not say anything 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)