



## Gospel Mk 4:26-34

*The mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds, grows into the biggest shrub of all.*

Jesus said to the crowds, 'This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man throws seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, he loses no time; he starts to reap because the harvest has come.'

He also said, 'What can we say the kingdom of God is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which at the time of its sowing in the soil is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.'

Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were alone.

## Reflection by Greg Sunter

This week's gospel is a wonderful example of the teaching style of Jesus. It even tells us that 'he would not speak to them except in parables'. Jesus used the parable form almost exclusively to share his message. He used imagery that was familiar to his audience; parables about the everyday life of a rural community: seeds, planting, growing, harvesting. The secret of Jesus' parables, when we understand the cultural context, is that there was always a 'twist in the tale' – what is called a 'discombobulating shift' – that turns the expected outcome of the story on its head.

This is nowhere more evident than in the image of the mustard seed. On the surface the parable is about the kingdom of God starting from very small, humble beginnings and growing into something great. However, immediately prior to this kingdom parable, Jesus has reminded us that the community makes a living out of growing grain crops like wheat for bread, etc. His parable about the mustard seed describes a tiny seed that grows into a great shrub 'so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade'. A farming community that was growing grain crops would be greatly alarmed at the thought of actually attracting birds to their fields or even nearby. Jesus' message about the kingdom of God is that it is actually disruptive and invasive. The kingdom brings unrest and disquiet to the predictable. The kingdom of God is unsettling. This is a much more challenging parable than it appears from a literal reading.

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# The Living Word

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

13 June 2021

## First Reading Ez 17:22-24

*I have made the small tree great.*

The Lord says this:

'From the top of the cedar,  
from the highest branch I will take a  
shoot  
and plant it myself on a very high  
mountain.

I will plant it on the high mountain of  
Israel.

It will sprout branches and bear fruit,  
and become a noble cedar.

Every kind of bird will live beneath it,  
every winged creature rest in the shade  
of its branches.

And every tree of the field will learn that  
I, the Lord, am the one

who stunts tall trees and makes the low  
ones grow,

who withers green trees and makes the  
withered green.

I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it.'

2. The just will flourish like the palm-tree  
and grow like a Lebanon cedar. (R.)

3. Planted in the house of the Lord  
they will flourish in the courts of our  
God,  
still bearing fruit when they are old,  
still full of sap, still green,  
to proclaim that the Lord is just.  
In him, my rock, there is no wrong. (R.)

## Second Reading 2 Cor 5:6-10

*Whether we are living in the body or exiled from it, we are intent on pleasing the Lord.*

We are always full of confidence when we remember that to live in the body means to be exiled from the Lord, going as we do by faith and not by sight - we are full of confidence, I say, and actually want to be exiled from the body and make our home with the Lord. Whether we are living in the body or exiled from it, we are intent on pleasing him. For all the truth about us will be brought out in the law court of Christ, and each of us will get what he deserves for the things he did in the body, good or bad.

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 91:2-3. 13-16. R. see v.2

(R.) *Lord it is good to give thanks to you.*

1. It is good to give thanks to the Lord  
to make music to your name, O Most  
High,  
to proclaim your love in the morning  
and your truth in the watches of the  
night. (R.)

## Gospel Acclamation

*Alleluia, alleluia!*

*The seed is the word of God, Christ is the  
sower;*

*all who come to him will live for ever.*

*Alleluia!*