

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2Corinthians 5:6-10; and Mark 4:26-34

Is the human race moving forward or backward? What about our culture? The Church? Do you take the progressive view, where humans are pushing forward? This view wants uncomfortable discussions about racism in order to end it. It celebrates the decline in poverty worldwide and gains made in education, medicine, economics and technology. It crows that we have left behind backward notions and ignorance, making way for the independence of the individual. Science is an authority we can trust. Or do you take the conservative view with its concern that we are letting ourselves lose hard won values and victories? This view longs to return to days of former glory. It reinforces power structures in order to preserve the values of family and community. The rapid pace of change needs to be slowed. Life should not be so complicated.

Remarkably, Scripture rejects both these viewpoints in favor of a third. Jesus says, "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." N.B. The sower is a minor player in this parable. The process of growth itself has the spotlight. Jesus continues, "Of its own accord the land yields fruit." Then we can step in once again in our supporting role as harvesters. "This is how it is with the kingdom of God."

As gardeners know, the growth and yield of plants are, to a large extent, beyond our control. We are at the mercy of the weather and pests. If we force total control, we end up with erosion, pollution and algae blooms in the Gulf. We have to let things happen. Likewise in life, God is in control and our job is to let things happen. Yes, human beings have to do the merciful acts that lead to a good world. And yes, God wants us to preserve what is already good. But before that, Jesus call us to conversion, the recognition that we are merely supporting actors while God writes and directs the play.

What is at stake is the limiting of what can be. We cannot imagine what is possible because we have a limited capacity to see the big picture and a limited capacity to love. However, God can do both of these and so is full of surprises. Look! A little mustard seed grows big enough to shelter all the birds of the sky! Behold! Tomatoes form in my garden! Look! A cruel person becomes kinder! Behold! The nations work together to [end poverty](#) in all its forms everywhere! Look! The immigrants become our friends! Behold! The Church finally [criminalizes sexual abuse](#) by its leaders!

Be aware that suffering and sin are still part of life. The pandemic has increased poverty and sexual abuse will continue. The redeemed person is not always perfect and immigrants will change life as we know it. Salvation History does not follow a straight line. 2Corinthians is a good example: Paul writes in a messy situation that will not improve. Despite his first awesome letter, the self-centered Corinthians did not change. Outsiders arrived and dissed Paul, so now the Corinthians will not listen to him. He made matters worse by breaking a promise to visit. He writes 2Cor to prove his credibility. The gist is "I am not perfect, but God is using me to bring the authentic gospel to you. You can trust me because I trust God utterly. I do not know where life is leading and I suffer a lot, but God is still at work. We walk by faith and not by sight." Christians must grasp this point: God is running the show. Bible scholar Walter Brueggemann says of our reading from Ezekiel, "Ancient Israel's prophets held to a vision of an alternative world in season and out of season because they understood that the new alternative to come was not to be derived from present circumstance... Their hope was independent of the present because the new world would be a gift from God, who acts in unqualified freedom."

If we can accept this premise of God's kingdom, our life will become a mystery of love, suffering and goodness. This is why Jesus speaks in parables. What he says will not make sense to unbelievers. Those who can accept it will stand in awe and reap the harvest.

- ❖ What good thing has happened in your life that has been pure gift?
- ❖ Where are you called to walk by faith and not by sight?