

Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time – Feb 16/17, 2018

First Reading: Ezekiel 17.22-24

Second Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.6-10

Gospel: Mark 4.26-34

The words “the Kingdom of God” are mentioned only in one of today’s readings – in the Gospel – and yet I believe that is what each of the readings are about. Both Ezekiel and Mark speak to that and how it comes about in the hidden and ordinary of everyday life.

Ron Rolheiser in his weekly article “Exile” speaks of life, expressed in today’s readings, as being “prodigal” - lavish, fertile and abundant. Step-by-step we are seduced into letting go of what we hold onto so that we can grow into something that only God can envisage. God’s love - meeting the ordinary and transforming it into extraordinary.

The imagery is rich with words that invite and entice us to listen with our hearts. Ezekiel speaks of the Lord cutting off a ‘tender piece’ of the youngest shoot of a cedar tree and planting it on a mountain. And from that it will provide fruit and its branches will support every type of bird.

In the Gospel, Jesus speaks to us and likens the Kingdom of God to a man scattering seeds that will grow without the man knowing how. The seed - one of the smallest to be found – a mustard seed and from it will grow the greatest of all shrubs where all the birds of the air will make their nests.

Both readings speak to me of the everyday ordinariness – the new shoot of a small tree – and the smallest of seeds. And St. Paul too speaks of how we walk by faith rather than sight.

The tender shoots and the small mustard seeds are like the invitations that are given to us each day in the ordinary of our lives. And even when we are unsure of accepting, even when we say no or not yet Lord – there are more seeds sown, more invitations to grow and to love.

Yesterday I attended a friend's graduation at St. Paul University here in Ottawa. What a beautiful celebration! I have never been to university myself – nor to college but yesterday I witnessed something extraordinary. I witnessed beautiful friendships that have been fostered and grown – between students of all ages, and from all over the world. Real relationships not just between students, but between and with their professors, mentors, advisors and staff. I saw such community there.

I witnessed the pride and love for all of the hard work and the building of relationships - it was so very evident as each graduate's name was called and as they received their diplomas and the congratulations that they earned. The air seemed to vibrate with triumph, joy and celebration.

Before yesterday there had been a small hole full of emptiness within me – one that would seem to explode at certain times in my life when I was unable to relate to others. Yesterday God healed a small forgotten piece of me - I know this simply because there is no longer that dark empty space within me. From the ordinary to the extraordinary.

Growth. Ordinary seeds are planted, buried in the soil and it is not until it breaks through the ground that we see the life of it.

I leave you with this poem titled "Covenant" by Margaret Halaska OSF because it describes everyday life – growth which starts out being so very small but with God - it becomes all encompassing:

*God
knocks at my door
seeking a home for his son.*

Rent is cheap, I say.

I don't want to rent. I want to buy, says God.

*I'm not sure I want to sell,
but you might come in and look around.*

I think I will, says God.

I might let you have a room or two.

I like it, says God. I'll take the two. You might decide to give me more someday.

I can wait, says God.

*I'd like to give you more,
but it's a bit difficult. I need some space for me.*

I know, says God, but I'll wait. I like what I see.

*Hm, maybe I can let you have another room.
I really don't need that much.*

Thanks, says God, I'll take it. I like what I see.

*I'd like to give you the whole house
but I'm not sure ...*

*Think on it, says God. I wouldn't put you out.
Your house would be mine and my son would live in it.
You'd have more space than you'd ever had before.*

I don't understand at all.

*I know, says God, but I can't tell you about that.
You'll have to discover it for yourself.
That can only happen if you let me have the whole house.*

A bit risky, I say.

Yes, says God, but try me.

*I'm not sure –
I'll let you know.*

I can wait, says God, I like what I see. By Margaret Halaska ...O.S.F.