

The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
June 13, 2021- 3rd Sunday After Pentecost, 6B
Given at St. Mark's Church, Bridgewater

Ezekiel 17: 22-24; Psalm 92: 1-4, 11-14; 2 Corinthians 5.6-17; Mark 4.26-34

“For the love of Christ urges us on... so that those who live might no longer live for themselves.” †

The writings of the prophet Ezekiel are rather harsh and difficult... they come following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians... and an exile in which the ‘chosen people’ found themselves displaced, disenchanting, and feeling hopeless. Yet, in the passage we heard today, Ezekiel speaks of God’s grace/ God’s love as regenerative and life giving to all the earth. All the trees of the forest, and the creatures that live within them, will know that YHWH is the sovereign source of life, with the power to build up and tear down!

In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks in parables again... in parables, mysterious and veiled, requiring us to really ponder the true message... You’ve all heard about the ‘mustard seed’... How the very small mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, becomes the greatest of trees. How *we*, when thrown out into the ‘world,’ can get lost in the weeds, like the seed, distracted by so many things, by obstacles in our path toward God... Yet in Christ, every one of us has the growth potential of a mustard seed...

This seems so hard in today’s world... the last year and half seems unrelenting with its challenges during the COVID pandemic. Perhaps some of us can relate to Ezekiel’s audience... feeling disenchanting and even hopeless in our circumstances. This world seems so hard... the *cosmos* (in Greek), which is often translated as ‘the world’ might be better translated ‘the system.’ The system wants us to follow its ways, to buy into its ideals... that are so often *not* God’s ways. Just look around at ‘the world’ and the violence, the hatred the selfishness...

And then we hear this letter from St. Paul to the Corinthians— “The love of Christ *urges* us on... so that those who live might no longer live for themselves.” The word here in Greek (*sune÷cei*) can be translated many ways. It means ‘to drive, to compel, to surround and to move’... The love of Christ surrounds us, and compels us; it pushes us...

As Christians, we don’t have to get caught-up in the ‘the world,’ we do not have to buy into ‘the system’...

We are not called to follow the agenda and ideals of ‘the world,’ and society... nor are we to live according to our own agenda, following our own desires.

So often, I find myself praying for my own needs, and I suspect many of you do too, asking God whether I’ve been forgotten... is God even there? And yet, as we learn from St. Paul today... as Christians, we are called/ urged to *love as God loves*. The love of God (*agape* – unconditional love) encompasses us, surrounds us, and moves

us... it compels and points us toward God's path and urges us to seek God and God's ways above anything else.

And this love is not something we earn or attain by our own effort... it arrived unknowingly, as a gift, given by that sovereign source of all life that Ezekiel spoke of! And through Jesus Christ, this gift changed everything, according to St. Paul: 'From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!'

In Christ, everything has become new, everything is *becoming* new... so, everything is different... Be mindful that God has told us, over and over in the Scriptures, God is in control, the only one with true power to tear down and build up ... Jesus told us, in the parable of the mustard seed that the Kingdom of God is a marvelous thing, and it is not within our control.

As we come to the altar today, may we experience the *love of Christ*, a love that compels us, moves us, and urges us on despite life's hardships... that encourages us to follow God's will and not our own... God's will, and not the world's.

May we all experience a new birth and that peace which is beyond our understanding. And grounded in God's love, may we find the strength to share that love with others... may it empower us to live out God's mission of love and reconciliation with everyone we meet. †