**Notes for Next Sunday**

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

**The Point of this Week’s Readings**

The Old Testament and the Gospel lessons deal with “Kingdom of God” examples. The Old Testament points to the future Kingdom of God when Christ comes. In the Gospel Jesus uses two parables that describe the kingdom of God now that Jesus has come.

Psalm (Psalm 1). This psalm begins with warnings about keeping company with evil people. The main point is that God’s children are to meditate on His Word at all times. The result of such dedication to the Scriptures will bring about great spiritual vitality.

Old Testament (Ezekiel 17:22-24). Chapter 17 takes place before the final siege of Jerusalem, which culminated in the destruction of the temple in 587 BC. These verses speak of a time when a remnant of the Babylonian exiles will return and Christ and His kingdom will emerge.

Epistle (2 Corinthians 5:1-17). Paul’s message to the Corinthians is one of comfort. He tells them that they, even in weak humanity, have an eternity with God awaiting them. The key to this confidence is that Christ died and rose for all people. Now they are new people.

Gospel (Mark 4:26-34). Here Jesus speaks two parables about the kingdom of God. The first is about a seed (God’s Word) that is planted and works in the hearts of people who are touched by power of God’s Word. The second is about a mustard seed which is very small. Even if it is diminutive, it grows into the largest of the garden plants. The kingdom of God started with just twelve disciples and has grown into a world-wide force.

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

**Psalm 1**

**﻿ 1﻿ Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. ﻿2﻿ But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ﻿3﻿ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. ﻿4﻿ Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. ﻿5﻿ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. ﻿6﻿ For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

*1:1 walk…stands…sits.* Each of these leads to the next. If we let sin walk into our lives, it will soon stand there firmly planted, and will eventually sit down and make it home with us.

*1:1 counsel of the wicked.* This means “getting loose from God and falling into evil.”

*1:1 way of sinners.* The “way of sinners” is their tendency to do wrong, their evil way of life.

*1:1 seat of scoffers.* These are they who ridicule God and defiantly reject his law. (CSB)

*1:2 law. “*Law” here refers to the whole word of God, both law and gospel. (The first five books of the Bible then – whole Scripture now) The Hebrew word here means “teaching” or “instruction.” Christians find their greatest joy in the gospel, which tells them of God’s forgiveness of their sins.

*1:2 meditates.* This is a half-aloud reading and rereading or the process of musing or meditating as it may be practiced in the Orient. It is obviously not an unwholesome absorption with the Scriptures, but a healthy interest in them and knowledge of their real content, which continually influence and affect the man so devoted to this holy treasure.

*1:2 day and night.* It means constantly. Luther: “This blessed man has his love, the Law of God, always in his mouth, always in his heart and, if possible, in his ear” (AE 14:298). (TLSB)

*1:3 prospers.* In such a life that God is crowning the man’s endeavors with success. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. Even negative things help the faith to grow.

*1:4 chaff that wind drives away.* Winnowing farmers harvested the grain and, on a breezy evening, would throw it into the air. Since the chaff was lighter than the grain, the breeze would blow the chaff away. Accumulated chaff was burned - vivid picture of the end of a life divorced from God. (TLSB)

**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.’”**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

*17:22* Sovereign Lord. This title 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 I myself.*† A beautiful Messianic promise follows, using the previous imagery in a prophetic way. (CSB)

*17:22 shoot.* This was a unique expression but one probably ultimately derived from the common description of the Messiah as a branch or shoot (cf Is 11:1; Jer 23:5; Zec 3:8). One could think of Jesus’ virginal birth as a tiny infant, though this may press the figure too far. (TLSB)

*17:22 the topmost of its young twigs*. As (in v 4) Nebuchadnezzar is figuratively described as breaking the top twigs (i.e., Jehoiachin, the legitimate king and of Davidic descent), so in the messianic era the Lord God will do something comparable (although on a vastly higher plane). (TLSB)

*17:22 high and lofty mountain.* Zion (Jerusalem) was situated on a small mountain, but this messianic abode far transcends earthly geography. It can scarcely be accidental that high mountains figure so prominently in the NT (e.g., the scene of our Lord’s temptations [Mt 4:1–11], the unnamed mount of transfiguration [Mt 17:1–13], and the new Jerusalem [Rv 21:2, 10]). (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.

Cedars don’t bear fruit. The miraculous reversal here is expressed in ultra-natural terms. God is doing something unexpected and impossible.

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

*17:23 Birds … will nest in it.* This is the portrayal of the church as a place of refuge for “birds over every sort” (i.e. all people, Jew and Gentile alike).

*17:24 bring it down.*  The theme of the “great reversal” is one of the most prominent Law/Gospel themes that span both testaments: God brings down the high and proud, but exalts the lowly; He dries up the green, but gives life and growth to those were dead. God kills with His Law in order to give resurrection life through the Gospel. The “great reversal” theme is particularly prominent in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12).

**Epistle – 2 Corinthians 5:1-17**

**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. ﻿2﻿ Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ﻿3﻿ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ﻿4﻿ For 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. ﻿5﻿ Now 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. ﻿6﻿ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ﻿7﻿ We live by faith, not by sight. ﻿8﻿ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ﻿9﻿ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ﻿10﻿ For 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.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

*5:1 earthly tent we live in.* This is our present body. As a tent is a temporary and flimsy abode, so our bodies are frail, vulnerable and wasting away (4:10–12, 16). (CSB)

*5:1 a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.* A solid structure—permanent, not temporary. This is one of the eternal realities that are as yet unseen. (CSB)

*5:2 we groan.* This means 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.

*5:2 clothed with our heavenly dwelling.* This means to be invested in something. In this case it is God who invested in us and has clothed us in a robe of righteousness.

*5:4 swallowed up by life.* Paul does not wish to do away with his temporal existence, for God has His purposes for all things. Rather, he earnestly prays that God swallow up his mortality with Christ-like immortality in His time.

*5:5 deposit.* It is earnest money. The first installment or down payment that promises the remainder.

*5:6 at home in the body … away from the Lord.* Christ is always with His people (Mt 18:20; 28:20). Here, Paul means away from the permanent, eternal reality of the new heavens and the new earth with the Lord (2Pt 3:13; Rv 21:1–7, 22–23). (TLSB)

*5:8* *away from the body … at home with the Lord.*† The situation of the Christian after death, when he is no longer living in his “earthly tent” (i.e., his body) but is in the immediate presence of the Lord. (CSB)

*5:9 whether we are at home in the body or away from it.* Whether we will be alive or will have already died at his coming. (CSB)

*5:13* *out of our mind … in our right mind.* Probably Paul’s enemies were asserting that he was suffering from religious mania, pointing perhaps to the sensational conversion he claimed to have experienced on the road to Damascus and to what they regarded as his insane way of life. If this is to be out of his mind, Paul does not deny it, for this whole letter shows how willingly and joyfully he endured affliction for the gospel (cf. 12:10). That, however, was essentially a matter between him and God. On the other hand, there was nothing that could be called eccentric about his manner of presenting the gospel to the Corinthians, for in this he had been, and continued to be, sensible and sober-minded, avoiding flowery rhetoric and all forms of sensationalism (cf. 1Co 2:1–5). (CSB)

*5:14 compels us*. This explains the phrase in verse 13, “are out of our mind.” Some people would say it is what makes us tick. For Paul it is the foundation for his selfless devotion to preaching Christ. It motivated him through physical and spiritual weakness, pain, suffering, and disappointment, all the way through the day of his martyrdom.

*5:16 regard no one from a worldly point of view.* Paul would not approach people from the world’s point of view but from God’s. (TLSB)

Paul had previously thought of Jesus as a mere man. He foolishly rejected Christ and persecuted His Church. (TLSB)

**Gospel – Mark 4:26-34**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The two parables have one truth in common: the Word of God is like seed in that it contains his all-sufficient power to create and grow his kingdom.

**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.”**

In this parable, which is about the reign and rule of God, these features can be “decoded” thus: (CC)

• the “man” (4:26) = Jesus

• the “seed” (4:26–27) = the Word

• the good “ground/earth” (4:26, 28) = those living under God’s reign and rule

• the sleeping and rising of the man who does not work the land (!), plus the seed sprouting on its own (4:27) = the powerful action of the Word without additional human assistance

• the soil with seed in it producing fruit (4:27) = the reign and rule of God being implemented in the lives of the followers of Jesus

• the “blade,” then the “ear,” and then the “full grain” (4:28) = growth and maturity (perhaps in given stages?)

• the “harvest” being ready (4:29) = the full goal in God’s plan being reached

• the “sickle” (4:29) = the judgment

• and the fruit allowing/offering the opportunity (4:29) = the coming of judgment at the proper time

**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.** See notes on Mt 13:31–32. (CSB)

*4:31 mustard seed.* A grain of mustard was traditionally seen as the smallest of all seeds, as noted in this verse, so it is used here to describe a very insignificant beginning.

*4:32 larger…plants*. One variety of mustard can reach a mature height of 10 feet, making it the largest plant in an herb garden. (TLSB)

*4:32 birds.* In contrast to v. 15, here the birds represent people of every nation. It alludes to a prophecy comparing the Messiah’s rule to a great tree in whose shadow “birds of every sort will nest” (Ezk 17:23). (TLSB)

*4:34* *He did not say anything to them without using a parable.* Jesus did not make His teaching confusing. Rather it was the people’s preconceptions that made His teaching seem hard. (TLSB)