

Grace and Peace from God our Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of the 52 Sundays in the year more than half of them are given over to celebrating *the Sundays after Pentecost*. The long green season. The title it used to go by was the Sundays after Trinity. These Sundays are also called ORDINARY TIME. *Ordinary time sounds to the ear like a let down*. Like nothing out of the ordinary is going to occur. It is also the time when *attendance wanes*, and *giving decreases*, and the pattern of our Christian *worship becomes as common and predictable* as the name ordinary implies.

The Gospel lesson for today is surprisingly and properly placed within the period of the liturgical year known as ordinary time. For the lesson in and of itself is given over to the ordinary things of life. ***The parables Jesus tells this morning are about the ordinary things of life: seeds, planting and growing.*** It tells us that the Kingdom of God is like *a mustard seed*, the ***smallest of all seeds which grows into the greatest of all shrubs.***

A GREAT SHRUB? The kingdom of God like a great shrub. Not a giant oak or a redwood, or even a Cedar of Lebanon like in our first reading. No. *Jesus compares the Kingdom to something ORDINARY growing into the something commonplace.*

Not a very inspiring image. The ordinary doesn't seem very exciting. Ordinary things don't usually capture our attention or take us by surprise. The ORDINARY isn't all that appealing. Most of us search out and seek for the extraordinary. ***We seek to be entertained and tantalized.***

Nevertheless, Jesus tells lots of parables with subjects that are ORDINARY to the people of His day. ***He speaks of sheep, catching fish, salt, and light, lost coins, neighbors wanting to borrow a loaf of bread; just***

to name a few. *Seeds being planted and sprouting and growing, the parables we have today, are just one of many examples.*

"The Kingdom of God," Jesus says, "is like a mustard seed." It's the smallest of seeds and yet grows into the greatest of all shrubs – not the greatest of all trees – the greatest of all shrubs. While the image may not be very inspiring, *Jesus' parable is inspired.*

No doubt Jesus was outside near a mustard bush where a family of birds had chosen to make their nest. Jesus probably plucked a seed pod off of the bush, and pulled off a single tiny mustard seed.

"See this little seed? The Kingdom of God is like this mustard seed. It's the tiniest of seeds, and yet it grows into the greatest of shrubs, and it puts forth branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

What this parable doesn't tell, which everyone Jesus speaks to knows, is that mustard shrubs are about as common as blackberry brambles in the Pacific Northwest, whereas, tall grand trees were few and far between in Palestine. While it's undeniably true that a mighty cedar offers far more nesting places than the ordinary mustard shrub, *mustard shrubs* – by virtue of their sheer number, ubiquity and commonness – *provide far more shelter for the birds of the air than all the great trees.*

This morning Jesus shares with us a great truth about the ordinary – hidden in the mustard shrub. The Kingdom of God is not revealed and built up by the high, the mighty, the amazing the titillating, the extraordinary, but rather by ordinary things, ordinary people, ordinary acts, which perhaps taken individually may not make much of an impression. Nonetheless, they provide the shade & refuge of God's real presence in this benighted world of ours.

Think about it. Jesus uses the ordinary things in life to talk about the

Kingdom, and it is through these ordinary things that Jesus reveals the Kingdom to us. He chooses words spoken by ***ordinary people***, words to tell the story and reveal God's Kingdom, God's way in the world. ***The LORD uses water as a sign of the kingdom, of cleansing and rebirth*** – choosing the stuff we drink, the stuff we cook in, the stuff we bathe in and brush our teeth with to be Holy and significant. God ***chooses simple gifts of bread and wine*** – ***things common in every household, staples, toast for bread, daily food*** – ***as a sign of his forgiveness and presence among us.***

Jesus takes the ordinary, words, water, bread and wine, and he uses them in an extraordinary ways.

It is precisely in these everyday gifts of word and water, bread and wine, that Jesus makes himself and his kingdom known. God doesn't reveal Godself through the extravagant and in the grandiose, or with what's big and flashy.

The extraordinary thing Jesus does for us – dying so that we might live – is accomplished using something that happens to everything. ***What is more ordinary than death in this world?*** It happens to everyone. In his death and resurrection there is hope and promise for each one of us. That hope and promise is made know in the words and water of Holy Baptism and in Holy Communion in the ordinary events in our Christian lives.

And what of us?

Though we may feel ordinary and insignificant, and though our lives may seem ordinary, ***the Good News is that God's choses what is ordinary to reveal the Kingdom of God – to bearing witness to God's presence in our world.*** Even though we may feel as common and insignificant as mustard seeds, ***God will use us – when we let God – to provide the haven and shelter of Christ's love for people who need it.***

And it is in our small ordinary acts of love and discipleship that Christ enters the world for others. You may not be a towering oak, or a majestic redwood, or a cedar of Lebanon, ***but Jesus tells us that the mustard shrub provides enough shade for all the birds to nest in.***

Ordinary time reminds us that ***what is truly holy is what happens after Sunday in our ordinary Monday through Saturday living. Jesus reminds us today that our lives are made holy in ORDINARY TIME and in ORDINARY WAYS.***

Our ministry is to and with ordinary people – people like you and me, people who live in small towns and country villages, people who live in large metropolitan areas with meandering suburbs, people who live in poor, poor, poverty stricken regions of the world.

There really isn't room for us to say, "*I'm just this,*" or "*I can't do that because, I'm too this or too that.*" Christ blesses is the ordinary, and we who have received God's ordinary gifts of word, water, bread and wine – as ordinary as we may be are sent out into the world to minister to lots of other people in simple, unpredictable, ORDINARY ways.

Often people are impressed with dazzling fountains and worship spaces as big as football fields filled with energetic worshippers, and that's all fine, but if one needs a cup of water, one other person to give a hug and show loving concern for them, the fountains and masses of people look more like giant oaks, redwoods, or cedar of Lebanon, than a safe place to seek shelter and shade.

Life as God's people is not about glitz and glory, but the discipline of faith, the ordinary times of naming the name and telling the story, and using ordinary men and women to reveal the extraordinary to the world. ***Amen!***