

Sermon Ezekiel 17 22 24 3rd Sunday after Pentecost series B

Sermon: 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Ezekiel 17:22-24 (v. 22)

Theme: God Himself takes care of His Kingdom

Goal: To trust God's work through Jesus, and to work according to His will

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Baby Leo Josef didn't ask to be born. It was a decision of his parents Jason and Faith that brought this child to life. – Did you ask to be born? Not either. There are always external causes that bring a child to life.

Can Leo Josef survive by himself? No. He needs to be nurtured, cared, and loved – to grow till he can survive by himself. And even then he will need the support of others, like all of us need one another.

Could baby Leo enter the Kingdom of God by himself? No. Like all of us, God came to his aid to give him the new birth through water and the Spirit in the Holy Baptism. He doesn't know what is happening today - as he didn't know about when he was conceived, what was happening when he was formed in his mother womb, and how he was born. But he is here, a new miracle of God's grace.

The text of the Old Testament and the parables of Jesus for today tell us about external forces that are working, causing plants to grow. Is God interested in planting and gardening? Of course He is; because everything was created by Him. But this is not the case of our biblical texts for today. God is speaking through parables to teach us a bigger truth: He is in charge of His Kingdom, His people, His church. He takes care with kindness and love of all of us and He gives new life in Christ, as He did with little Leo Josef, and makes His church to grow.

I – The reality

When Prophet Ezekiel wrote this text around 600 years B.C., God's people as a nation seemed to have disappeared. Nebuchadnezzar had defeated Israel in a war, destroyed the cities, burned down the temple, killed many and took thousand to exile. Ezekiel was among them, living now in a foreign land, Babylon (currently Iran and Iraqi). In the midst of desperation, God called Ezekiel to proclaim His Word to His people. They were still His people! First of all, Ezekiel proclaimed a hard law against them: This all happened because you and your fathers abandoned the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaak and Jacob, and followed other gods. Repent and return to the true God, and He will accept you!

Israel remained 70 years in the exile in Babylon. After this they were allowed to go back to their land by the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah. Important to notice that they learned the lesson: They never more followed other false gods after the exile. Many of them became very faithful to God, while others just preserved their traditions. This was the situation Jesus found among His people when He came to earth.

The Christian Church faced many up and downs in her history: Times of growth and prosperity; times of persecution; times of internal crises. When we take an overlook on the Christian Church in the 21st century, we will see that she still suffers lots of persecution in countries like North Korea, were the Islamic State is fighting, and in several other countries. Internal crisis due polemic issues of the societies are causing splits among several historical churches. Our church and our Synod are not growing that much. Shall we give up and become discouragement?

II – A Word of Hope

The Prophet has a Word of Hope for the people of his time and for us as well. “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it... it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar.” We know that this is not the way that someone plants cedar. But this is a parable, a comparison: God will restore His people. He will plant it again. He will take care of it and it will grow! People could do nothing for themselves. God intervenes and does everything for them!

And it really happened. God didn't give up His plan to prepare a people from whom His Son Jesus would be born. The promise to Abraham must be accomplished. And Israel was re-established till Jesus reorganized the kingdom of God, not based on a race anymore, but on faith, where “birds of every kind nest in it... and find shelter in the shade of its branches”, to use the words of our text. This means: People from all around the world would come to the church and be part of the Kingdom of God. We are included in them.

When Jesus preached His parables, He speaks about God's unique work as well. “This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.”

Our task is to seed, to proclaim God's love and forgiveness in Jesus; God gives the growth. We have to be faithful in seeding the good seed of God's pure Word, to perform the Sacraments of the Holy Baptism and the Holy Communion according to Jesus' commandment, and God will give the growth. This is always happening and we don't know how. We just trust that God does His work. And He does! We can be sure of this!

In spite of all persecution and crises of the Christian Church, I read this week a nice commentary: *Jesus speaks of a kingdom today that started very small, (just a shoot of a cedar); just a mustard seed, 12 fishermen, a few women, a handful of people. But today it is indeed a mighty tree. Some two billion people claim Jesus as savior today. 100,000 new converts are made today.*

That happens because God's people are welcoming sinners, forgiving them, loving them. God's kingdom extends its branches out into this world in a loving embrace. God works amazing miracles through that love this day too. His kingdom grows automatically. It grows potently. (Phil Brandt, Pentecost 3, p.44).

God is doing His work, even if we are not that aware of it. We have to trust and to do what is our task: To seed, to water, to care. God will do His work. Just don't resist to His gracious will, but let Him work in your heart too, growing faith and love.

Conclusion: You all know that I like gardening. I scattered loots of seeds and bulbs in my garden two months ago: poppies, freesias, blue iris... I enjoy watching the development of the plants and I wait eagerly for the time they will come with flowers. But I can do nothing but water, take out the weeds around, and watch till the right time. – When I do this, I think about St. Thomas and God's good seed.

The Apostle Paul wrote about his work in Corinth: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow... we are God's fellow workers." (1 Corinthians 3:6,9). The good seed of God's Word and His love have been sowed and cultivated here at St. Thomas for more than 21 years. Many seeds sprout out and are bearing fruit. Some seeds take more time to sprout; but I am still waiting for them. The harvest belongs to God. My prayer is that God will always keep His promise and be gracious to all, bringing many to His Kingdom. Amen.