

Proper 6B: 6/13/21
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[Reconstructed from notes]

"I the Lord have spoken: I will accomplish it." (Ezekiel 17: 24)

If we make it through next week we will have achieved every scheduled Sunday since last summer out here on the North Lawn with no weather cancellations. These days I'm going to take whatever victories we can muster from this demanding and tragic year.

I also think we should acknowledge that even if we've made it through relatively unscathed, we're each traumatized just by living through this historic year or so. It's been one for the history books.

I love history for the same reason I love Scripture – it puts things into perspective and helps us make sense of our lives now.

Today we read from the prophet Ezekiel who rarely appears in our lectionary. If you know anything of this prophet, it's probably Ezekiel 37 – the valley of dry bones read at the Easter Vigil. God's Spirit breathing life back into those brittle bones.

Ezekiel became a prophet later in life after having been carted off into exile. He lived through the Babylonian exile, saw life as he knew it destroyed and the temple, his place and practice of worship, obliterated. A lot of Ezekiel is commenting on the gritty and gory real politics of his time. To give you a sense of just how gritty and gory things were, the king was tortured and blinded, and his sons didn't make it out alive.

Into this context, today's reading offers the deceptively simple and pleasant image of the majestic cedar. Note that it's the Lord God who's doing all the talking and all the acting. The Lord God sees the lofty cedar that's been there forever and . . . lets it be. God takes a sprig (I think of it as the little branch I use for asperging during Easter). God takes this little sprig – tender, vulnerable -- and plants it on a high mountain, close to God.

It requires patience, but in time that sprig will bear fruit. It will grow ample boughs to welcome every kind of bird and winged creature. And all trees, all creation, will know God is Lord.

It ends on a poetic note with a line which sounds like it may have inspired Mary mother of Jesus' Magnificat where she sings the praises of God who "knocks the mighty from their thrones" and "fills the hungry with good things" -- that great cosmic and holy reversal. Here, the Lord God promises to bring the high trees low and the low trees high, and make the green trees dry and the dry trees green.

You'll note the same imagery and energy in today's Gospel from Mark. We get that parable of the sowing of the seed which could be translated as saying that it grows, when God sows it, *automatically*. Many of us love that other parable of the tiny mustard seed which grows into the greatest of all shrubs.

So let's think about the next period of history we're entering as we emerge, God willing, from the pandemic era just endured. I understand the urge to try to switch on all the lights at the same time. To try to make up for lost time. But I have sat with these readings of Scripture, and am going to suggest that we *not rush*. The Scripture from earlier periods of upheaval counsels us to make room for God. It cautions us not to rush to climb that mighty cedar, but wait and see what God can do with a tender little sprig.

Trust God's grace to be at work even when things appear to be fallow. (Many of us are seeing this in our gardens. They didn't look so promising several weeks ago, but now we're beginning to enjoy all the blooms and bright colors.)

Join God in taking Sabbath,
remembering that God is God and we're not.

Perhaps the most important thing we can DO right now is rest in God. Yes, we're preparing to move back into the sanctuary, installing new equipment to make things easier for our tech volunteers, and planning events where we can dream big and capture what we've learned from this experience. All that is happening and it's wonderfully important.

But beyond that, our "task" is to make space to rest in God.
Pray for healing – for those who've lost loved ones to COVID,
for our nation, for the world.

And, please hear me, *pray for healing for yourself.*
You may not even realize you need it –
all the more reason to pray for healing for yourself.

I beg us to be gentle with ourselves and others. To give each other the benefit of the doubt. One of my graces from this period is that I find I'm a bit less judgmental. I still have a long way to go, but for now I'm more willing to give everyone (including myself) the benefit of the doubt, assuming we're all doing the best we can at this difficult time.

Trust that the twig, the seed, that God has planted will bear fruit,
nourishing every bird and winged creature.

The Lord God has spoken. And the Lord God will accomplish it.

AMEN.