Proper 6B 2021 The Word of God alone grows the Kingdom of God

Ezekiel 17: 22-24 2 Corinthians 5: 1-10(11-17) Mark 4: 26-34

What joy there is in the church in Ontario this day! The family of God rejoices to come together in person and is content with the scraps of 15% capacity. Yet out of the Lord’s abundant mercy, there are still 12 baskets of leftovers. What a blessing to be only 2m apart instead of being separated by a screen! What joy in singing the praises of our God!

When the covid restrictions began, there was no little anxiety in the land as our sense of community migrated to virtual. What then with the church? Will she survive this? How will she pay the bills when she was made fearful of touching the offering plates?

Yet by the grace of God here we are. By the grace of God, the restrictions are being lifted. By the grace of God, his church continues to grow.

God must give the growth

The propers for today reflect the theme of growth in the Kingdom of God. And why not, as we see growth in our gardens, isn’t it much better to reflect on how God grows his eternal garden?

Can there be growth anywhere if God does not grant it? Whether the increase happens in a garden, a nation or in God’s eternal kingdom, without God’s blessing it cannot be so. The smartest scientist cannot make anything grow. The boldest biologist cannot explain how a dead seed planted in the ground comes alive.

Jesus speaks of a sower scattering on the ground, and then goes on with his life as that seed germinates, grows and ripens unto maturity. But he knows not how this happens! Dead seeds put into soil spring up in new life. This is a mystery. Who can explain it?

We know not how

Yet on the third day, (Genesis 1:11) God said: *Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth. And it was so*.”

So, God said it and it was so. By the mouth of the Lord, His Word goes out and brings forth life from the earth. And ever since then, with each passing springtime, we still marvel and are inspired by new growth emerging from the dead of winter. Garden centers and nurseries bustle with business even with curb side shopping.

How many shoppers stop to ponder that their purchases of bedding plants and garden seeds will yield growth only because God said Let the earth sprout vegetation? Have you ever wondered why? Or does it get swept away by the work of having to get it all into the ground?

God’s Word alone gives life

We have time now to think how God gives growth by His word. God said it and it will always be so. Blessed be the mouth of the Lord that speaks and from it comes life. As God grants this new life in our gardens, He also grants it in His eternal kingdom. Quite apart from us, God adds to His church. Do you know that during this lockdown, God has baptized 4 little ones and God-willing another one this coming Saturday? Noah, Isabella, Eva, Ethan and Logan are now names near and dear to the One who has given them a second birth from heaven. All of the restrictions not-withstanding, the kingdom of heaven grows and we know not how.

Yet it has not stopped us to try to grow the church ourselves. We are tempted to relocate the church to welcome new members. We have put our faith in money to keep the church alive. We have set targets for new members and have invested much in the science called “church growth” to analyze receptivity to the gospel.

And in our arrogance, have taken credit that the church still stands because of our efforts. If we had faith in God’s Word, then we would spend more time in His word than in planning meetings. Yet it is not wrong to plan in life at home or at church. We can and should make future plans for our gardens and our church, while giving thanks to God for by the word of His mouth, He still in kindness gives the growth.

When God speaks, does He ever forget to do it?

God only said it once, that the earth should sprout and it has happened ever since. See how His word spoken is final and fertile! The Old Testament reading in Ezekiel features the growth of Israel and the future growth of the church. God said: **I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it.**

As all of the trees of the field know, that God alone brings the low one high and the high one low or that God alone makes the dry tree green, and the green one dry, so also we should hear that God gives growth to the church.

He started with one on the cross. His faithful son, was the entire nation of Israel reduced to one faithful son. The dead body of His beloved son was planted in the ground of the earth from where Adam’s body was first made. But the second Adam trusted the word of God and believed without seeing or feeling, even despite it, that His father would still take care of him and love him.

On the third day, the Father raised his Son from the dead and crowned him with glory and honour and gave him all authority in heaven and on earth. All that God had promised in Holy Scriptures, was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. God said it and did it.

All sin was buried with Christ. All our hope was renewed in the New Life of His Resurrection.

Will He bring life out of our dead bodies?

When your death comes, and you must stare at your grave, how silly is it to put your faith in your diet, exercise, and bank account? Can any of these give you hope? The wicked have trusted in them but blessed is the one (Psalm 1) who does not commune with them, but delights in the word of the Lord and on his torah meditates day and night.

As the way of the wicked perishes, the way of the righteous flourishes. For the righteous trusted in Christ and are comforted that as Christ lives so shall they. They have put on Christ in baptism and have flourished in the garden of all of God’s Promises in Christ. As their righteousness comes from Christ and not themselves, so have all of their good fruit come from Christ. The joy of seeing Christ on that Day and being with Him is not the joy of only one. It is shared and given to all who are known by God and loved by Him.

Search the Holy Scriptures and learn from them to hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life.