



# 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost 17 June 2018

PROPER 6 YEAR B RCL  
11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

## THE COL-LECT

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

**People:** *And also with you.*

Celebrant: Let us pray.

**K**eeep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

NB. <sup>1</sup>THE COLLECT for today has been modified many times throughout its history. The Sarum Missal<sup>a</sup> changed the original wording

in the Gregorian Sacramentary<sup>b</sup> to *LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy house-hold the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen. This collect was appointed for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity.

# R

eadings  
Year B  
17 June 2018

## THE READINGS<sup>2</sup> APPOINTED FOR TODAY ARE FOUND ON PAGE

|  |   |        |
|--|---|--------|
| 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13<br><i>or</i> Ezekiel 17:22-24 | Expect the unexpected <sup>3a</sup>       | 3<br>5 |
| Psalms 20<br><i>or</i> Psalm 92:1-4, 11-14         | Prayer for Victory<br>Thanksgiving        | 6<br>7 |
| 2 Corinthians 5:6-10,<br>[11-13], 14-17            | Challenge of a new Creation <sup>3a</sup> | 8      |
| Mark 4:26-34                                       | We planted a tree <sup>3a</sup>           | 10     |

**The First Reading:** 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13  
[Alternate: Ezekiel 17:22-24]

### <sup>4</sup>INTRODUCTION

In this text, God is calling Samuel to expect the unexpected, to look beyond the things we commonly believe signify greatness, and to see the signs of leadership written on the heart. In DiCamillo's humorous tale, Flora has the ability to expect the unexpected and sees that Ulysses is more than a squirrel, he is actually a superhero. "The squirrel certainly didn't look very heroic. But then, neither did [her favorite superhero]." (Chapter 11) This text and story invite us to consider the ways God gifts and sends those we least expect to make a big difference in the world.

1 Samuel 15: 1-3; 28-33

<sup>1</sup>Samuel said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the LORD. <sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they

did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. <sup>3</sup>Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” . . .

<sup>28</sup>And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. <sup>29</sup>Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind.” <sup>30</sup>Then Saul said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God.” <sup>31</sup>So Samuel turned back after Saul; and Saul worshiped the LORD.

<sup>32</sup>Then Samuel said, “Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me.” And Agag came to him haltingly. Agag said, “Surely this is the bitterness of death.” <sup>33</sup>But Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so your mother shall be childless among women.” And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

*[continued on insert 'Readings for 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday - Omitted Verses]*

## **1 Samuel 15:34-35**

### **34-35**

**T**hen Samuel went to Rā'-mäh; and Saul went up to his house in Gib'-ě-äh of Saul. <sup>35</sup>Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the Lord was sorry that he had made Saul king over Israel.

### **16:1-13**

**T**he Lord said to Samuel, ‘How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.’

<sup>2</sup>Samuel said, ‘How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.’ And the Lord said, ‘Take a heifer with you, and say, “I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.”’ <sup>3</sup>Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I

will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.’

<sup>4</sup>Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, ‘Do you come peaceably?’ <sup>5</sup>He said, ‘Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.’ And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

<sup>6</sup>When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.’ <sup>7</sup>But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’

<sup>8</sup>Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ <sup>9</sup>Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, ‘Neither has the Lord chosen this one.’ <sup>10</sup>Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, ‘The Lord has not chosen any of these.’

<sup>11</sup>Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.’ And Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.’ <sup>12</sup>He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.’ <sup>13</sup>Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

<sup>14</sup>Now the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. <sup>15</sup>And Saul’s servants said to him, “See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. <sup>16</sup>Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.” <sup>17</sup>So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me someone who can play well, and bring him to me.” <sup>18</sup>One of the young men answered, “I have seen a

son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him.”

<sup>19</sup>So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, “Send me your son David who is with the sheep.” <sup>20</sup>Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them by his son David to Saul. <sup>21</sup>And David came to Saul, and entered his service. Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. <sup>22</sup>Saul sent to Jesse, saying, “Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight.” <sup>23</sup>And whenever the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand, and Saul would be relieved and feel better, and the evil spirit would depart from him.

## The Word of the Lord *Thanks be to God*

### **Alternate:** Ezekiel 17:22-24

#### <sup>3</sup>INTRODUCTION

The optional passage from Ezekiel is for all intents a source of the lovely quote, “Only God can make a tree.” [Poem is on page 13]

<sup>22</sup> Thus says the Lord God:

I myself will take a sprig  
from the lofty top of a cedar;  
I will set it out.

I will break off a tender one  
from the topmost of its young twigs;

I myself will plant it  
on a high and lofty mountain.

<sup>23</sup> On the mountain height of Israel

I will plant it,  
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit,  
and become a noble cedar.

Under it every kind of bird will live;  
in the shade of its branches will nest  
winged creatures of every kind.

<sup>24</sup> All the trees of the field shall know  
that I am the Lord.

I bring low the high tree,

I make high the low tree;  
I dry up the green tree  
and make the dry tree flourish.  
I the Lord have spoken;  
I will accomplish it.

The Word of the Lord  
*Thanks be to God*

**THE RESPONSE** Psalm 20 *Exaudiat te Dominus*

[Alternate: Psalm 92:1-4,11-14] *Bonum est confiteri*

<sup>3</sup>INTRODUCTION

It seems as if psalmists typically pray for themselves. However, in Psalm 20 the poet prays for someone else, in this case Israel's king. After all, verse 4 refers to God's "anointed." Verse 9 also speaks explicitly of "the king." Psalm 20 expresses a strong sense of dependence on God's gracious provision even for rulers. While most of the psalmist's contemporaries assumed that their monarchs stayed in power because of their gods' favor and military might, Psalm 9's poet recognizes that it's the living God's protection, not Israel's military power that preserves her king. [*cont'd*]

**M**ay the Lord answer you in the day of trouble, \*  
the Name of the God of Jacob defend you;  
<sup>2</sup> Send you help from his holy place \*  
and strengthen you out of Zion;  
<sup>3</sup> Remember all your offerings \*  
and accept your burnt sacrifice;  
<sup>4</sup> Grant you your heart's desire \*  
and prosper all your plans.  
<sup>5</sup> We will shout for joy at your victory  
and triumph in the Name of our God; \*  
may the Lord grant all your requests.  
<sup>6</sup> Now I know that the Lord gives victory to his anointed; \*  
he will answer him out of his holy heaven,  
with the victorious strength of his right hand.  
<sup>7</sup> Some put their trust in chariots and some in horses, \*

but we will call upon the Name of the Lord our God.

<sup>8</sup> They collapse and fall down, \*  
but we will arise and stand upright.

<sup>9</sup> O Lord, give victory to the king \*  
and answer us when we call.

**Alternate:** Psalm 92:1-4,11-14] *Bonum est confiteri*

#### INTRODUCTION

The superscription for Psalm 92 declares it to be “a song for the Sabbath day.” This may be puzzling to readers, for the Sabbath is not referenced anywhere in the rest of the psalm. It may be, however, that understanding the setting of the Sabbath is key for interpreting the entire work.

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2489](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2489)

<sup>1</sup> It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, \*  
and to sing praises to your Name, O Most High;  
<sup>2</sup> To tell of your loving-kindness early in the morning \*  
and of your faithfulness in the night season;  
<sup>3</sup> On the psaltery, and on the lyre, \*  
and to the melody of the harp.  
<sup>4</sup> For you have made me glad by your acts, O Lord; \*  
and I shout for joy because of the works of your hands.  
<sup>11</sup> The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, \*  
and shall spread abroad like a cedar of Lebanon.  
<sup>12</sup> Those who are planted in the house of the Lord \*  
shall flourish in the courts of our God;  
<sup>13</sup> They shall still bear fruit in old age; \*  
they shall be green and succulent;  
<sup>14</sup> That they may show how upright the Lord is, \*  
my Rock, in whom there is no fault.

THE EPISTLE      2 Corinthians 5:6-10, (11-13), 14-17

#### <sup>4</sup>INTRODUCTION

In hearing this text we are challenged to consider what it means to be a new creation, transformed by our relationship with Christ.

In *Counting By 7s*, a number of characters are transformed by their relationship with Willow Chance. This transformation is particularly poignant for the odd guidance counselor, Dell Duke. “He was changing. He was capable of that... It was on the inside... Because for the first time, in as long as he could remember, Dell belonged...” (Chapter 44) In the same way belonging changed Dell, the belonging we find in Christ changes who we are. This text and novel invite us to consider the way our relationship with Christ and with others has transformed us into new creations.

<sup>1</sup>For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup>For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— <sup>3</sup>if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. <sup>4</sup>For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup>He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

<https://www.biblegateway.com>

### 5:6-17

**S**o we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord— <sup>7</sup>for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup>Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

<sup>10</sup>For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

[<sup>11</sup> Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. <sup>12</sup>We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. <sup>13</sup>For

*if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.]*

<sup>14</sup>For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

<sup>16</sup>From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

<sup>18</sup>All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. <sup>20</sup>So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

### **The Word of the Lord** ***Thanks be to God***

#### **THE GOSPEL**

**Mark 4:26-34**

[Compare parables of the soil in Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15]

#### <sup>4</sup>**INTRODUCTION**

Jesus describes the tiny mustard seed sprouting and growing great. The tiny seed holds so much hope and it tells us that God can bring about God's kingdom through the smallest action, from the smallest person, and it will spread. Muldrow's book feels much like an extension of this parable. Readers see people of all ages around the world planting trees. The story explores many of the wonderful ways planting a tree can make the world a better place and help to heal the earth. *We*

*Planted a Tree* is a lovely picture book to help people visualize and consider the way God's kingdom is being cultivated around the world.

[see verses 1-25 Readings for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday on insert]

**Mark 4:26-34**

**H**e also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, <sup>27</sup>and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. <sup>28</sup>The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup>But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'

<sup>30</sup>He also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? <sup>31</sup>It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; <sup>32</sup>yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'

<sup>33</sup>With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup>he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained every-thing in private to his disciples.

The Gospel of our Lord  
*All praise to you, Lord Christ*



*Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.*

*The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Church of Christ in the USA, and used by permission.*

*The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.*

*From The Lectionary Page: <http://lectionarypage.net> and <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/fourth-sunday-after-pentecost>*



## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>COLLECT: <sup>a</sup>The Sarum Rite was the liturgical form used in most of the English Church prior to the introduction of the first Book of Common Prayer in 1549. Like most of the liturgies of the Church at that time, it was extensive and complicated. It takes only a short study of it to appreciate Archbishop Cranmer's criticisms of it found in the Preface of the 1549 Book; for example: "... the number and hardness of the rules called the pie, and the manifold changings of the service, was the cause, yet to turn the book only, was so hard and intricate a matter, that many times, there was more business to find out what should be read, than to read it when it was found out."

<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/Sarum/index.htm>

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY (PENTECOST 22)

<https://acollectionofprayers.wordpress.com/tag/saxon-agenda/>

<sup>b</sup>Gregorian Sacramentary [79]: A family of liturgical books traditionally ascribed to Pope St. Gregory I [590-604], sometimes called the Sacramentary of Adrian I. Charlemagne\*, anxious to introduce the Roman Rite into his kingdom, wrote to Pope Adrian I between the years 781 and 791 asking him to send him the service-book of the Roman Church. The book sent by the pope is the nucleus of the Gregorian Sacramentary. It was then copied a great number of times, so that there are many versions of it, all containing additions made by the various scribes. The Sacramentary was originally the book for the Celebrant which contained all the prayers.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06351a.htm>

\*Charlemagne was crowned *Imperator Augustus* in Rome on Christmas Day, 800 by Pope Leo III and is therefore regarded as the founder of the Holy Roman Empire (as Charles I).

<http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Charlemagne>

Here are two translations from the Latin of the Collect from the Gregorian Sacramentary: *O Almighty and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things that thou wouldest have done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

<http://www.lectionarycentral.com/trinity22/trinity22.html>

*O Lord, keep your household, the Church, in continual godliness, that through your protection we may be free from all adversities and devoutly given to serve you in good works to the glory of your name; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. Gregorian\** [79.] It is used on Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity (Pentecost 22).

<https://acollectionofprayers.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/the-historic-collects.pdf>

Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury [1533-1556] included it in *The First English Prayer Book*, 1549, for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Trinity **as Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy household the church in continual godliness; that through the protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

#### HEADINGS:

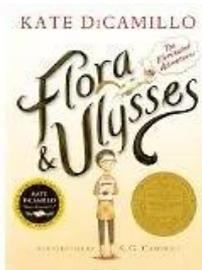
<sup>3a</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel: <http://storypath.upsem.edu>

<sup>3a</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5: <http://storypath.upsem.edu>

<sup>3b</sup> Mark 4: <http://storypath.upsem.edu>

#### <sup>4</sup>INTRODUCTION:

1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15; 16:1-13



<http://storypath.upsem.edu/lectionary-links-sunday-june-14-2015/>



From Taizé, a meditation on 1 Samuel 16:1, 6-13.

Sometimes the Bible seems very complicated. Why do the Books of Samuel describe so many political rivalries, the failure of a king, the accession of his successor? Why does it look at the same reality from so many different and sometimes contradictory angles? Why retain different versions of the same event, without attempting to unify the whole? Where is the Word of God in the midst of all this?

The biblical authors re-read the history of their people while looking for God's presence in it. In this re-reading, they wanted to understand how God, despite appearances, was guiding his people or, conversely, how he was not behind this or that human project, for which only hardened hearts and deafness to the divine call were responsible. A re-reading of history in faith allowed them to understand some events differently. The transition from tribal life to the monarchy occupies an important place in this story, with mixed views on the monarchy. This is where King David comes to the fore. It is remarkable that in these stories, which intend to speak of God's plan, to show what the divine will is, the human dimension is not negated. Documents from different periods do not hide the power struggles, the political tensions and the human weaknesses, as if the various authors of the Bible knew that God's will works itself out in the midst of an often ambiguous human history, as if the readers were asked to accept that contradictions are part of the landscape.

The Books of Samuel want to stress that David became king by the will of God. The ultimate explanation of his success is not his political or military skill. Rumors had circulated that perhaps he came to power by shedding innocent blood or by ruthlessness. These texts give the lie to such statements. David has not usurped the crown, it was given to him.

Recognizing God's presence or absence is not easy. The prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem and had to anoint one of the sons of Jesse which God has chosen. Eliab, the first one who appeared, has the right look, and Samuel unwisely dares a "surely" (v. 6). But as the seven sons of Jesse appear one after another, the prophet's becomes more cautious.

Finally, he can only wait for a word from God to indicate his choice, however unexpected it might be. One day, others with whom God has been in touch will come to Bethlehem. They will be called to recognize God's presence in a child and later on, in Jerusalem, to see a king in a young man nailed to a cross. The prophets knew that appearances are deceiving. God is often where no one expects him to be.

► How can not giving too much importance to appearances be a source of freedom?

► Letting God surprise us: why is such an attitude so important for anyone wishing to discern God's presence?

[https://www.taize.fr/en\\_article167.html?date=2011-05-01](https://www.taize.fr/en_article167.html?date=2011-05-01)

## **Ezekiel 17:22-24**

### **Trees**

I THINK that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest  
Against the sweet earth's flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

Joyce Kilmer. 1886–1918

Louis Untermeyer, ed. (1885–1977). *Modern American Poetry*. 1919.

## **Psalms 20**

In Psalm 20 the poet prays that God will bless the king by answering and protecting him when he's in trouble. Such a prayer for rulers is, as James Mays notes, an "ancient and enduring tradition." So Psalm 20 invites those who preach and teach it to reflect with worshippers on the frequency and nature of their prayers for their leaders.

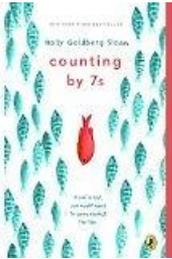
Of course, Israel's king was uniquely the Lord's anointed. However, the apostle Paul reminds us that God has also put modern rulers in

place. In Romans 13:1 he insists, “The authorities that exist have been established by God.” So perhaps Psalm 20 challenges worshipers to spend even more time praying for our leaders than we do criticizing, questioning or even praising them.

Yet our prayers for our presidents, prime ministers and other leaders are always at least somewhat fraught with danger. They easily reflect a kind of idolatry that identifies a ruler or nation with God and God’s purposes and forgets that God’s Church and kingdom stretches across the whole world. What’s more, as we pray for our rulers’ “success,” we easily slide into depending on their success rather than depending on God’s gracious provision.

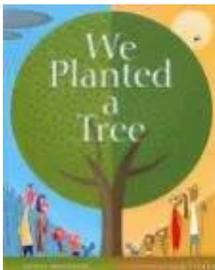
[http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-6b-/?type=the\\_lectionary\\_psalms](http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-6b-/?type=the_lectionary_psalms)

#### <sup>4</sup>Second Reading: **2 Corinthians 5:6-10 (11-13), 14-17**



<http://storypath.upsem.edu/lectionary-links-sunday-june-14-2015/>  
[Counting By 7s](#) by Holly Goldberg Sloan

#### <sup>4</sup>The Gospel Mark 4



<http://storypath.upsem.edu/lectionary-links-sunday-june-14-2015/>  
[We Planted a Tree](#) by Diane Muldrow

## A Patristic Commentary on The Gospel according to St. Mark

The disciples might have found it difficult to comprehend how they would present light to the world. That is, why the Lord confirmed to them that the ministry work is a divine and a continuous labor, that would have its activity in the life of others, even in moments of weaknesses, through which a minister may pass; saying, *“The kingdom of God is, as of a man should scatter seeds on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seeds should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself”* (verses 26-28).

Some scholars call this parable (the Patient Sower)<sup>1</sup>; The Lord scattered the seeds, not worrying, but positive that His kingdom is no doubt coming.

### THE DIVINE LABOR AND THE MUSTARD SEED

That is the third parable given by the Lord Christ in this chapter. The first is the parable of the sower, that gives us hope; so as not to worry about the seeds that fell on the ground and did not produce fruit; as there are other grounds that produce hundred-, sixty-, and thirty-fold

The second is the parable of the sower who does not know how the seed grows; God is the One who labors, even though the missionary work seems like a seed in the middle of the ground, surrounded by darkness.

The third parable is that of the “mustard seed;” that teaches us not to worry, if we see the missionary work, at its beginning, so tiny like a mustard seed; for it will, eventually, grow to become a big tree where the birds of the air nest under its shade.

In this parable we notice: a- In the old times, a great kingdom was referred to as a tree in the middle of the earth, under which the beasts of the field find shade, in whose branches dwell the birds of heavens (Dan. 4:10-12; Ezek. 31:6), as would the kingdom, so wide, includes countries and nations, which it protects against any foreign aggression. As to the tree mentioned here by the Lord, it is a spiritual kingdom that drew through the cross, nations and peoples, to find in it a place of comfort.

b- The Lord used the “*mustard seed*” in particular, as a reference to His heavenly kingdom for two reasons: The first, that the benefit of that seed, is better demonstrated when it is squeezed or pressed; and it becomes a tree if buried in the ground, as if carries a reference to the

passion and burial through which the Lord would pass. The second is that, it was well known among the Jews (in Palestine) that it is the littlest of the seed, so the Lord used it to reveal the mystery of His kingdom.

c- We have already expressed views of certain Church Fathers concerning the relation of the mustard seed to the kingdom of the Lord Christ<sup>1</sup>. As for examples of the views of Pope Gregory (the Great), St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and of St. Hilary of Poitiers, we shall include here only some words by St. Cyril the Great, in this concern:

[The analogy is superb; as it is very fitting to present them with what would happen to the Holy divine missionary work, concerning the gospel, which He calls the kingdom of heaven; as through it we are granted the right of fellowship in the kingdom of Christ. That missionary work was, at the beginning, presented to few persons, and on a small scale, to extend later on to cover all nations. It was first preached only in Judea, where the blessed disciples were very limited in number. Then, as the Jews rejected it, the command came to the saintly disciples to, “*go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...*” (Mt. 28:19)].

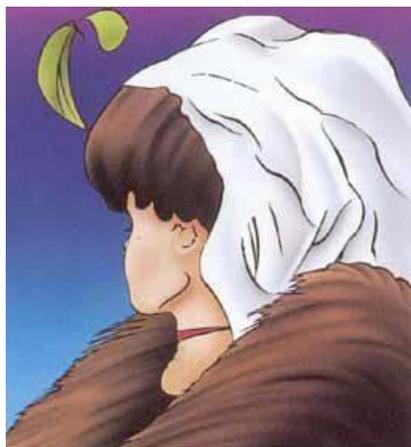
Thus, as the mustard seed is very tiny in its size compared to the seeds of other plants, it grows much higher than other normal herbs, to become a shelter for many birds. So it is with the kingdom of heaven, whose message started by being presented to few people, to grow rapidly to become a shelter to nations and peoples to nest under its shade, considered as birds, as the human affairs are reckoned small, when compared to God’s.

<http://www.orthodoxebooks.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Gospel%20of%20Mark%20-%20Father%20Tadros%20Yacoub%20Malaty.pdf>



## **Redbirds, Seeds, and Weeds: What You See Is Not All You Get**

The following sermon is based on 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13;  
2 Corinthians 5:6-17; and Mark 4:26-34. Proper 6B



*What do you see: a young lady or an old woman?*

We live in a world that mostly believes what you see is what you get. We trust our eyes to reveal what is real and what is true. For most of us, I suspect, this is our default attitude and orientation to other people, our relationships, and the circumstances of our lives. This approach certainly has its benefits. It is easier, definitive, and more efficient. It is not, however, without problems. A what-you-see-is-what-you-get attitude assumes that life is limited to physical and tangible realities. It keeps us skimming across the surface of life. It puts humanity at the center of life as the final interpreter and arbiter.

We tend to see what we want to see, what we have been taught or told to see, and what we expect to see. Just because we look at the same thing doesn't necessarily mean we see the same thing. Three eye witnesses to an accident will most often tell three different stories of what they saw.

I remember taking my younger son to the bird park one afternoon when he was four or five years old. We walked the trails, talked, laughed, and played. Walking back to the truck he said, "Do you see that bird on the pole?" "Yes," I said. "He is red and very noisy." To me it looked just like any other redbird, but not to Randy. "He's talking to me," he said. "He doesn't want me to leave. He wants me to stay here with you." He saw much more

than a noisy redbird. He saw a relationship, love, security, and contentment. He was willing to see in a different way.

What we see is determined not so much by the thing seen but by how we see. I am convinced that a primary purpose of holy scripture and sacred doctrine is not just to tell us what to see but to teach us how to see. Paul reminds the Corinthians that “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Samuel looked on Eliab and thought he was the Lord’s anointed, the next king after Saul. “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart’” (1 Sam. 16:6-7).

Too often human-seeing is outwardly focused and appearance based. God-seeing, however, is inwardly focused and heart based. This is not a rejection of outward and visible appearances but the recognition that our life and world is not limited to what we see. For every outward appearance we see there is a deeper inner reality.

A what-you-see-is-what-you-get way of living is too limited, narrow, and small. It cannot reveal the fullness of God’s life and presence among us. It offers no hope for reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, and transformation. It says to us, “This is as good as it gets.” If that’s how we see our life and the world then we might need to learn to see differently. God-seeing reveals that in Christ there is a new creation, everything old has passed away, everything has become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

We are always being invited into a deeper seeing. That’s what Jesus’ parables are about. They are the lens that aligns human-seeing with God-seeing. They give us a glimpse into God’s kingdom even as we look at the things of this world. Parables ask us to see in a different way. They rarely give answers. Instead they sharpen our focus and cultivate a deeper vision. Parables ask us to let go of a what-you-see-is-what-you-get world and trust that what we see is not all there is. There is always something more going on than what we see. That something more is the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God is already planted in creation. God is always at work in our lives like a seed scattered upon the earth. As a seed does its seed thing so the kingdom does its kingdom thing. We may not understand it. Outward appearances may even suggest God is absent. It may look like nothing is happening. We sleep and rise. We wait. We trust. We hope. We pray. We go about the ordinary work of life. Within that ordinariness the life of God has already been planted in each one of us. One day it sprouts. It grows. The invisible becomes visible. The full harvest was always there hidden in the seeds. It may have been invisible but it was never absent. We now see what has always been.

Compared to the needs of the world and the circumstances of our lives the kingdom can often look small, insignificant, and inadequate; like a mustard seed. Looks, however, can be deceiving. It is only an optical illusion. The kingdom will take over.

In first century Palestine mustard was considered a weed. Jesus compares the kingdom with a weed. As weeds take over, so does the kingdom of God. You can refuse to plant it. You can pull it up. You can cut it down. Regardless, it is there and it keeps coming back. No person or circumstance is ever Godforsaken.

The redbirds, seeds, and weeds of life are everywhere. Don't just look at what you see. Look at what is there. Look again if you need to. Look more deeply. Change how you see. Behind every redbird, seed, and weed is the faithfulness, promise, and power of God to change lives.

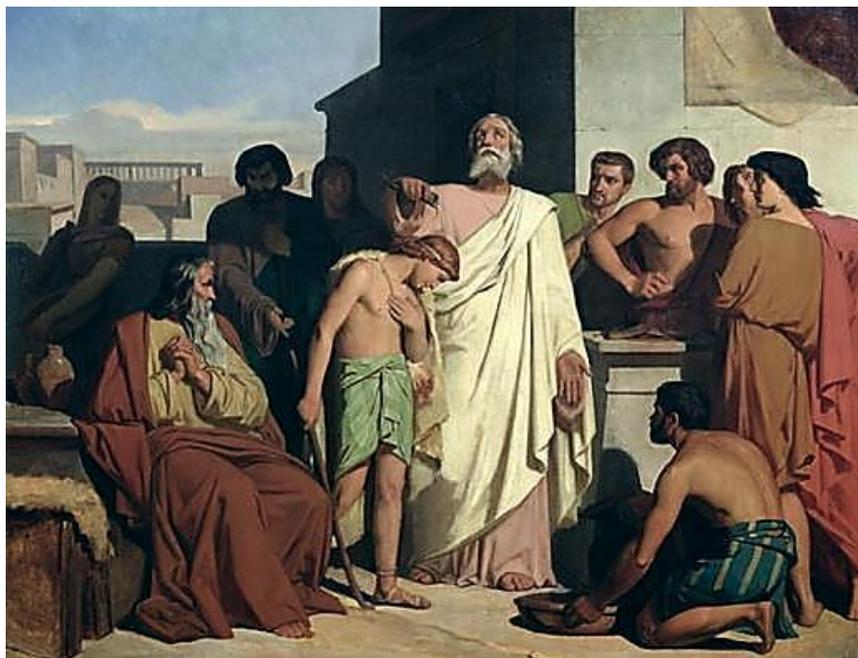
<https://interruptingthesilence.com/2012/06/17/redbirds-seeds-and-weeds-what-you-see-is-not-all-you-get-a-sermon-on-mark-426-34-proper-6b/>



Samuel Anointing David, third century. Interior wood panel from Dura Europos, National Museum of Damascus, Syria.

The third-century Dura Europos synagogue paintings represent the earliest continuous narrative cycle of biblical images known in art. The synagogue was built in AD 244/245 and destroyed in 256 in the Sassanid sack of the city. This rapid destruction helped to preserve its unique frescoes, whose discovery in the French-American excavations in the 1920's marked a new beginning in the study of Jewish art.

<https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/tools/image-gallery/d/david-and-samuel>



### Anointing of David by Samuel, 1842

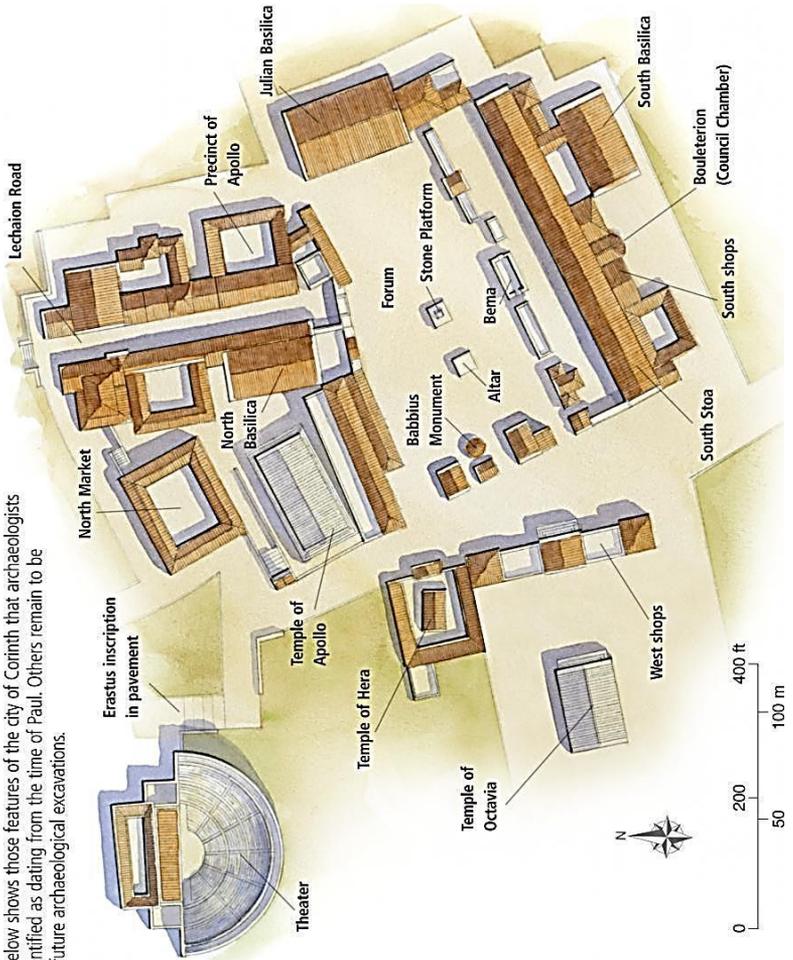
Barrias, Felix-Joseph (1822-1907); French. Medium: oil on canvas. Date: 1842. Onction de David par Samuel; Samuel anoints David as the next king but Saul retains the throne; Saul refuses God's decision to reject him as king and remains on the throne; prophet Samuel obeys God's command to travel to Bethlehem to locate God's choice for the new king, Saul's replacement Provenance: Musee de la Ville de Paris, Musee du Petit-Palais, France / Giraudon. Photographic Rights The Bridgeman Art Library.

<https://ideastream.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/xir222296fre/anointing-of-david-by-samuel-1842-xir222296-fre/#.Wxf4u1VKgs4>

<https://donsnotes.wordpress.com/2014/09/07/introduction-authentic-context-corinth-in-pauls-day-and-some-historical-context>  
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## CORINTH IN THE TIME OF PAUL (C. A.D. 60)

The city plan below shows those features of the city of Corinth that archaeologists have so far identified as dating from the time of Paul. Others remain to be discovered by future archaeological excavations.



<https://donsnotes.wordpress.com/2014/09/07/introduction-authentic-context-corinth-in-pauls-day-and-some-historical-context>



Etching by [Jan Luyken](#) illustrating the parable, from the [Bowyer Bible](#).  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable\\_of\\_the\\_Mustard\\_Seed](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parable_of_the_Mustard_Seed)