

“The Kingdom of God”

Jesus says the kingdom of God is like a small mustard seed, which when sown, grows so large that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade. And, if you were paying attention, then you heard the Lord say a very similar thing in the days of Ezekiel the prophet.

The Lord promises to take a young, tender twig from the lofty top of the cedar and plant it on a high and lofty mountain – and it will bear branches and produce fruit – and the birds of the air will nest in its branches.

In both of these readings – it is the kingdom of God that is being pictured for us. Now, when the Lord speaks of His kingdom – don’t think in terms of a place (like some boundaries of a kingdom) – but rather, of how God rules in His kingdom, here on earth. That is what He is revealed to you today.

To better understand, let’s take a look at the greater context of Ezekiel 17 – and identify some items in the picture.

God’s people Israel have been unfaithful – breaking His covenant with them, to be their God. They had placed their “fear, love and trust” elsewhere – in other so-called gods.

Israel is pictured as a cedar tree planted in Lebanon – and the Lord sends a “great eagle” who takes the top off the cedar. This great eagle is Babylon – who snatches away the king and other leaders of Israel – deporting them to Babylon, planting them there.

Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar sets up his puppet king in Judah (“one of the royal offspring”). This king looked to another “great eagle” – which is Egypt – for help in breaking free from the Babylonians. But they are no help – and in the end – a “strong east wind” (the Babylonian armies) blows against Israel, destroying Jerusalem in the year 587 B.C.

This is what the Lord is doing when He says – “I bring low the high tree, and make high the low tree, dry up the green tree, and make the dry tree flourish.” This is how it is in His kingdom – how He rules here on earth.

He brings down the high and mighty who will not listen to Him and follow Him – and raises up, exalts the lowly. The impenitent sinner is brought low – the repentant sinner is exalted in His kingdom.

This is how He rules through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus is that tender, young twig that is planted on “a high and lofty mountain” – on Mt. Zion, which is the picture of His Church on earth.

With this promise of the Messiah, the Christ – the Savior, who is Jesus – He is giving those who believe a future, a place in His kingdom (under His gracious rule). It is pictured as a great tree in which all the birds can nest in its branches.

From a seemingly insignificant tiny mustard seed – or a tender little twig – the Lord’s kingdom is so grand that all can rest in its shade. Again – this is how God rules – and we would do well to pay attention to it – so we don’t discount the seemingly insignificant things He uses to rule in His Church, His kingdom on earth.

The Lord has told Israel, and tells us not to put our trust in princes. God’s people were not to fear Babylon more than they feared Him – they were not to look to Egypt for their deliverance and salvation – they were to look to the Lord THEIR God in repentant faith, trusting that He would restore them, and deliver them.

So, don’t trust in princes. Don’t live with a faith that says – “If we could only get this candidate, or that one elected, then everything would be good and peace restored.”

This may be a good time to clear up some confusion with regards to the nation of Israel – as some Christians look to Israel as a “great eagle” who will save us. There are some who believe that it is absolutely necessary for the nation of Israel to be preserved – so that the temple can be rebuilt in Jerusalem – all because they mistakenly believe that Jesus will then return to set up His kingdom on earth.

You see what’s happening? The way that God promises to rule, and IS ruling on earth now – is overlooked. Jesus reigning by His Word and Sacraments are seen as little mustard seeds – insignificant, not up to the task – even though the Lord says this is how He will deal with our sin and death and give us life everlasting.

The nation of Israel is not necessary for salvation. The temple does not need to be rebuilt. Now, some will call these words anti-Semitic – but it's not – it's not a hatred of the Jews. It's actually a love for the Jews (and all people) to point them to the Lord who is ruling and reigning over all things NOW for their benefit, their salvation.

Just as Egypt was not the Lord's means of deliverance for His people – to “fear, love and trust” in the nation of Israel will not pan out either. And who knows, maybe another great eagle will be sent to take away that “cedar” so that man will not put their trust in nations, and be led astray.

The Lord has provided you with a young, tender twig who has been planted and has become the resting place for all people. Jesus is that Savior promised to Adam and Eve – the Seed of the woman. He is the infant child who rules and reigns over all creation. He is the Savior for all – even if many think that nothing good can come from Him.

Jesus has established His Church on earth so that He might be with you, and for you. Through His Word and Sacraments He brings low the proud and mighty sinner – and resurrects and exalts the humble and lowly sinner.

That's what He is doing this very day “for you.” To dwell in the branches of His Church is to receive what He promises and offers. You are like a tree withered by the winds of this world, sapped of all strength and hope – but with His “I forgive you all your sins” – Jesus makes the dry tree flourish with a new life and a new hope.

His Body and Blood – His preached Word – they are like mustard seeds which seem like nothing in comparison with the troubles you endure, the problems you face – but in them Christ is at work, causing His kingdom to grow – so that you may rest in Him – so that you may hold fast to that blessed hope of life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.