

Opening the Word: The supreme generosity of new life in God



Although their rhetoric is often ecstatically hopeful, prophets will not let Israel forget the source of their fortune. The God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.

The prophet Ezekiel speaks to Israel in exile, the chosen people longing to return to the promised land. God is about to do something wonderful for Israel. Israel will be like a majestic tree, wonderful for all to behold. The restored kingdom of Israel will produce rich fruit, and the birds of the air will find a home in Israel's lush branches.

The prophet is clear that this is not because Israel earned this gift. The restoration of Israel is because of the supremely generous nature of God. The highest tree shall be brought low. The lowest tree shall be raised up. God notices those who have nothing, illuminating the lowly with the rays of divine glory. But to those who build themselves up, who rely on their own ingenuity, they shall be reduced to but a stump.

[June 13 – Eleventh
Sunday in Ordinary
Time](#)

Ez 17:22-24
Ps 92:2-3, 13-14,
15-16
2 Cor 5:6-10
Mk 4:26-34

Jesus takes up this image from Ezekiel in the Gospel of Mark. Unlike Ezekiel, Our Lord does not compare the kingdom of God

to the lofty [cedars of Lebanon](#). No, the kingdom of God is like a [mustard seed](#). Small. Hidden. From this seed comes forth a large tree where all the birds of the air may find a home.

Still, like Ezekiel, Jesus is clear that this is the work of God rather than the result of human effort. It is not we who construct the kingdom of God out of strategic plans or best practices (though some of these may be helpful). Rather, it is the wondrous design of the God who creates a seed so small that may nonetheless become so large.

Pure gift from a God, who gives and gives.

The Church in the United States has much to learn from the generosity of a God who wondrously cultivates the mustard seed. There is something about U.S. culture that puts too much emphasis on our own rigorous, religious striving.

We have a can-do attitude, a sense that we can plan, construct and earn our way into the communion of saints. If that man or that woman just tries a little harder, they can be like us, citizens of the kingdom of God.

Against this assumption, we have the mustard seed. It grows and grows because the God who created the heavens and the earth, who called Israel into covenant, and who became flesh and dwelt among us knows no other way than “to give.”

Gift upon gift upon gift.

God’s supreme generosity does not let us off the hook, relieving us of any religious commitment or practice.

But this commitment or practice should be understood as a return gift of love to the God who first loved us. We do not rely on our own excellence in the Christian life, presuming that we are the gods that matter.

Quite the opposite! Each Sunday at Mass, as we are exhorted to praise God, we exclaim, “It is right and just.” It is right

and just to worship God because we are not God. To worship God is therefore not a matter of excellence on our part. Worship is an act of justice.

The Psalms tell us that the just one shall be like a tree planted beside running waters. The growth of the tree finds its source in the refreshing waters of divine love rather than itself.

So, let us rejoice in the glories that God promises us.

And that rejoicing means never forgetting the source of all holiness.

God, not us.

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