

PROPER 6B (Father's Day)

Ezekiel 31: 1-6, 10-14

Psalm 92: 1-4, 11-14

2 Corinthians 5: 1-10

Mark 4: 26-34

Please turn in your prayer books to page 86, in the Morning Prayer Section to Canticle 10. Let's read it together slowly:

**Seek the Lord while he wills to be found; *
call upon him when he draws near.
Let the wicked forsake their ways *
and the evil ones their thoughts;
And let them turn to the Lord, and he will have compassion, *
and to our God, for he will richly pardon.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts, *
nor your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth, *
so are my ways higher than your ways,
and my thoughts than your thoughts.
For as rain and snow fall from the heavens *
and return not again, but water the earth,
Bringing forth life and giving growth, *
seed for sowing and bread for eating,
So is my word that goes forth from my mouth; *
it will not return to me empty;
But it will accomplish that which I have purposed, *
and prosper in that for which I sent it.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: *
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.**

We celebrate the Fathers of the human family on this day, those who have provided paternal guidance and support to us and to others. The image of God as a Father can be very hard or troublesome for people whose human fathers fell short or were truly

bad. But, if we had a good father, relying on God the Father can seem easy or natural. We celebrate Fathers today, but God is not like our human fathers. God's ways are not our ways.

We rely on God for everything – God is our Creator, our Savior, our Sustainer. But, our expectations can greatly color how we react to God. What we believe about God makes a difference – will he judge me harshly or will he have mercy and love me to the end?? Am I truly the beloved child of God for all eternity or will God forget me, lose track of me, or move on past me. There's an old Gospel hymn that has a haunting, yearning melody –

**Pass me not, O gentle Savior,
Hear my humble cry;
While on others Thou art calling,
Do not pass me by.**

The phrase “just wait until your Father gets home” had an ominous meaning for children whose Father was the disciplinarian. Instead of this, I hold in my mind the childhood picture of my neighbor, Susan, who went joyfully every day to meet her father as he strolled down the sidewalk from the bus stop at 4:47. My father was faithful and loving – I miss him still. But, I expect to see him again, not as he was, but as he will be, in eternal life. We believe, as Christians, that God is with us always, in this world and the next.

Today's lessons build on last week's theme of trusting that God will be present for us and faithful to us. The readings in your insert assure us that God will act and come to us as He promised. Our God promises that he is in control of all that is and that all will be made well in God's time. We live through cycles of birth, growth and death, just like all other kinds of life on this earth. Yet, God has promised that we will transcend this cycle of life that we see. There is more promised than what is visible to our eyes from the time and place where we are now.

Our job is to wait – to wait wherever here and now may be. Our task is always to remain in deep relationship with God and pass God's love onto our neighbors. That's the central message of the Advent season, but it is also the lesson of the long, green season – Ordinary Time. As disciples of Jesus, we are to be here, seeking the will of God and doing our best to follow the individual path that God sets out in front of us. Even when we stumble, God will not falter.

The themes of God's promises to faithfully guide and help us are carried through the readings that we heard today. Jesus speaks in today's Gospel about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God, with ourselves included, is coming to fulfillment by Christ, through the

Holy Spirit. Jesus promises that the Kingdom of God will be like the plants of the earth. He compares the coming Kingdom to a crop, planted in the ground and growing into a fruitful grain, ready for harvest. He also compares the Kingdom to a mustard seed, which grows and serves as the home for birds and animals. [You can compare it to Jersey corn, grown from 6 inches to twenty inches in the past week.] God's promises are of growth and fruitfulness within a Kingdom that, unlike the earth, will never end. Within the Kingdom of God; we are promised life, now and forever.

There is much about the Kingdom of God that is a mystery.

And, truth be told, there is much about our life within the human, earthly circle of life that is a mystery, too. Some things we know. We know for sure that in the created world, we are bound not only to the life cycle of birth, growth and death, we are also bound to God, the creator of that cycle. We know from these stories of scripture what our role is...we, Christians and the Church, are the seeds in an agricultural system in which God is the farmer. Jesus tells us in other stories that we are branches on the vine of Jesus' own self, with God as the vinedresser. In the economy of the Kingdom, we are seeds full of possibility for growth and fulfillment before the harvest, but we

are in the hands of a farmer who will ultimately decide what the schedule is for planting, fertilizing and harvest. As a crop designed to grow in this fertile earth, our lives are full of meaning. Yet, much of that meaning and mystery; we will never penetrate here on this earth.

In some situations, our need to wait and trust in God is clear. King David in the Old Testament trusted God, returning to the love and peace and God each time after he wandered away. His life took him far from the boyhood shepherd's life we see him called from in the first reading. The Psalm we read earlier is about the King, thought to be David, and his soldiers preparing for war. The Psalmist is confident that God will show up and give them the needed supplies, reinforcements and, ultimately, the battle victory. At the end of the service, listen to a special blessing crafted from the words of this Psalm.

In the second lesson, from his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, the apostle Paul expresses confidence that God is nearby to support and encourage us, even when we cannot see God clearly. He writes: **We are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord-- for we walk by faith, not by sight.** As earthly creatures, we cannot

always comprehend the appearances and actions of God. By faith, we continue our path, looking for signs and guideposts that will surely arrive.

We are not left as people without hope. Three weeks ago, we celebrated Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit to be our comforter and advocate, to support us in our struggles here...whatever they may be. In the reading from Acts at Pentecost, we heard Jesus say: **“It is not for you to know the times and the seasons.”** But, Paul was certain of God’s presence and he assured the Corinthian Christians: **“...He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”**

It is hard to accept this guarantee and to look beyond the time and place where we are planted just now to see that the promises of God are true. It is hard to wait patiently and believe the promises of God will be true for us and for this sinful and hurting world. We cannot always see where we are going, and we cannot always understand all that will be in eternity and the fulfillment of God’s kingdom. Paul was quite honest about that, too. **“We walk by faith, not by sight.”** Just as the tiny mustard seed, so small that hundreds

of them fit a spice jar, becomes a large tree, fruitful and flourishing – we can bear fruit and love.

It is a mysterious thing, this movement of the Spirit, through us, building the Kingdom of God. We are, each of us, playing a meaningful role in the growth of the tree that is the kingdom. Each of us is part of that larger body, moving by faith, sustained by the Spirit, toward the fruition of our own cycle of earthly life. We are in God's hands and he will not fail to fulfill his promises. Each day, as we walk by faith, we are given the gift of God's spirit. Each day, we are called to do our part, even when we cannot see what positive outcome there might be.

We walk by faith, not by sight...because God's sight is not our own, his ways are not our ways. We do not, we cannot have the perspective of our creator, our farmer, our eternal King. God's power and glory and the richness of the Kingdom are beyond our earthly sight. Yet we wait, patiently and hopefully, because we know that our Father God's promises are true. At Bishop Cuncell's funeral, I heard a story that I had heard Bishop Cuncell himself tell. His father-in-law, a Methodist pastor, got up at his own wife's funeral for the sermon. He stepped up to the pulpit and said: **God's promises are**

true. Then, he went back to the front pew and sat down. Often, when I am with the dying, that is the last thing I whisper to them as God's representative here on earth. I lean over to make sure they hear and say: **God loves you. All God's promises are true.** It is the message we all need to hear. Do not give up. God is near. God loves you. God will make all things well. Stay ready and waiting. Say to God – **Here I am. I love you.**

BLESSING

May God answer you on the day you stumble and fall. May the name of the God put you out of harm's reach. May the Lord send reinforcements from Holy Hill and dispatch fresh supplies from Zion. May the Holy One exclaim over your offerings, celebrate your sacrifices, and give you what your heart desires. And may God Almighty – Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit - be present with you always and guide you to accomplish your plans. Alleluia! Amen.

From Psalm 20 - <http://worshipcloset.com/3rd-sunday-after-pentecost-ordinary-11b-words-for-worship-year-b/>