

## Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

[Reading I: Ezekiel 17:22-24](#)

[Responsorial Psalm: 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-161](#)

[Reading II: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10](#)

[Gospel: Mark 4:26-34](#)

Readings may be found on the US Bishop's website:  
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/061624.cfm>

Both the passages from Ezekiel and Mark for today present parables. Parable translates the Hebrew word, *Mashal*, which can include riddles, parables, proverbs, allegories, and fables. These stories, images, and sayings were very effective in an oral culture to help people remember and share key messages.

Most parables attempted to explain something beyond the audience's experience by comparing it to something that was a common experience. Many parables begin with "the reign of God may be compared to ..." Within these parables, there is often something unusual or strange that will catch the listeners' attention. This is often not apparent to a modern audience who does not practice ancient agricultural methods. Careful attention is needed to understand the message.

The prophet Ezekiel worked among the Jewish exiles during the Babylonian captivity (586 – 537 BC). When the residents of Jerusalem were deported to Babylon, they lost their king, land, Temple, and independence. Ezekiel shares an image of hope in the passage today.

Jerusalem was often referred to as a high mountain. It is one of the higher hills in Judea but not truly a mountain even though it is called Mt Zion. The images of the reign of God picture God on the high mountain of Zion and all the peoples of the earth coming to God. This is the background for God planting a shoot on a high mountain. God will reestablish the Davidic monarchy, and the birds (people) will find shade and rest there. It will be God who does it and not human plans and efforts.

Historically, the monarchy was not restored when the people returned to Jerusalem after the Persians conquered the Babylonians. The priestly leaders gained influence, and an administrative system developed alongside the priests. This was continued until the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD. (King Herod of the New Testament era and his family were Roman appointees and not part of the Davidic line.) In Christian understanding, it is Jesus who is the new shoot who will provide safety and life for all people.

The Gospel passage presents two parables to help people understand the reign of God. The reign of God is like the growth of seeds. Whether the human planter is there or not, the plants grow. The reign of God is not under the control of humans. God is the one who gives the growth. Now farmers at the time of Jesus would sense something out of line. One had to weed and water for growth to take place. This seed had extraordinary power to be able to grow on its own. The reign of God is like that. God's reign comes about by God's power, not by human planning or human strategy.

God calls humans to particular tasks, and those are the tasks to which one must be attentive. The reign or kingdom is not ours that we produce for God but God's work that each person must accept and do their part in bringing forth. The sower sowed seeds. St Paul reflects on this in chapter 3: 7 - 9 of the First Letter to the Corinthians: *"Therefore, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one*



Vincent van Gogh's *The Sower*, 1888

*who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor. For we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building."*

The second parable presents the contrast between a mustard seed and the full-grown bush/tree. The mustard seed is small, just a spec, yet at maturity, depending on the environment, it can be between 6 and 20 feet tall with a spread of up to 20 feet. The amazing difference between the seed and the bush.

Just so, the small things of the reign of God, helping another person, forgiving, teaching, or encouraging, can yield something enormous. One does not know what the long-term outcome will be. To help someone may provide the strength or opportunity for them to do something great, for the reign of God to come forth in that person's life.

The second reading is a fitting example of the themes that are presented in Ezekiel and Mark. In the preceding chapters, Paul has been defending the authenticity of his ministry and preaching against false teachers. These teachers point to their eloquence and strength. Paul admits his weakness and frailty and declares that God works through frail human vessels.

Paul's faith fills him with courage. He has faced many sufferings and has been near death. While death would end the suffering and bring him into eternal life with Christ, he wants to do what would most please the Lord. He recognizes that his life is not simply his life. It is a gift from God, who has sent him on a mission. He knows that he will come before God at the end of his earthly life and give an account. The hope of eternal life is the motivating factor for Paul. He lives with an eye to eternity.

**Themes:**

Parables

Reign of God

Virtues of Faith and Hope

Disciples' relationship with the rest of creation

**Reflection Questions:**

What small things in your life have produced something abundant?

How is God's reign becoming apparent to you?

What perspectives or assumptions differ between our culture and the Gospel vision?

What are the key motivations in your life?

In making plans, do you consider what impact these will have on your eternal life?

**Prayer Suggestions:**

For the Church: that the seed of faith planted in the heart of each believer may grow into a bountiful manifestation of God's reign in the world

For a deeper love and appreciation for God's Word: that the Word of God will nourish and enrich us as we strive to be true disciples of Jesus

For the tender shoots in our midst: that God will give abundant growth for the young, to those new to the faith, and those beginning their ministry and guide them to maturity of faith and service

For a spirit of Evangelization: that we may scatter God's Word through our work, daily activities, and conversations so that many people may encounter Christ today

For fledgling Christian communities and new parishes and dioceses: that God will bless their efforts, confirm them in faith, and guide their activities so that the Gospel may transform hearts and society