

You may have noticed that the lessons for today all have to do with life-- the life that grows in the earth and nurtures and feeds us, and the new life we are said to have in Christ as Christians. Perhaps the one, the first one, illustrates the other.

The lesson from the OT prophet Ezekiel uses the metaphor of a sprig from a lofty cedar tree (an evergreen) to illustrate how God's Messiah was going to come out of the family line of David the King and set up his own kingdom, the kingdom of God, on Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, in Israel. That's ONE reason we who honor the Bible, try to protect Jerusalem.

The Psalm also looks to trees to illustrate how the righteous will flourish and grow. The righteous are planted securely, like trees by the river. They do not plant themselves. They do not water themselves. The Lord plants the righteous, and grows them according to His Plan. These flourish, produce fruit, and are green, full of life and increase, even in old age. Unlike the wicked. The wicked do not so prosper.

The Gospel lesson is also about life—the life garnered in the harvest—but it means the final ingathering of the people of earth who have either been weeds or wheat. In order to produce a harvest, God has scattered the good seed upon the earth, and waits for the wheat to grow to full maturity. In good time, He will gather in a great harvest of good grain when it's ripe, but not so the chaff, the weeds. They will not go into the Kingdom with the sprouts that grew, for the Kingdom of God.

In some ways, the lesson from 2nd Corinthians is out of sync, though, with these other seed, soil and water lessons. The lesson from 2nd Corinthians does not talk about trees, or wheat, but about a different creation—the NEW creation.

St. Paul is talking about a whole NEW creation, because the old creation is going to pass away. But he is talking about the people of God. Of these, St. Paul assures us, "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old passed away; see, everything, has become new!"

And then he tells us all about our resurrection bodies, the body we will have in heaven, compared to our bodies now.

Paul is talking about you and me, here, and now, and says we already ARE a new creation! In our baptism, where we died with Christ, we came alive again with the Spirit in us, born anew, as new

creation creatures.

Paul is not talking here about the new life constituting a slight improvement in us, or even a great improvement in us. It's something entirely NEW.

Goodness only knows, we all have grown tired of watching television commercials about products which claim they are something new, when they really are old with some improvements.

It's a NEW creation the scripture is talking about. And that's what we want to see. Oh, I do not want to talk about ME working on ME anymore. I'm done with being overly optimistic about working on myself. It's mostly effort, and little result. So I do not want to talk about improved mental conditions, or physical conditions, or spiritual conditions, or emotional conditions, much as this would be a great thing for those who wish it.

Heaven knows, we have all tried to improve ourselves, and found it difficult to sustain even moderate changes, even if necessity demands that we must improve in order to even continue to live, or perhaps to live well.

So, changes that WE make for ourselves is not what Paul is talking about. He's talking about a new creation. All the commentaries I read have got it wrong. I kept saying NO NO NO, as I read them. The Bible is talking about a new creation—not anything new WE are going to create, on this earth.

Philosophers in the last century were eager to proclaim that humanity was on the way to self-improvement, and could make a better world. How well do you think we are any good at making a better world? Look at the world news. We are not going to make it a better world. Because we cannot create anything that is absolutely new, and certainly, not ourselves.

People complain about the world the way it is. But I am not optimistic about movements to “improve” our country. We need a radical change here that can only come from above. Only God can turn things around when so much power has been given to so many who are running the ship aground. Things have gone too far. Only God can turn this ship around, and only if WE give GOD command.

But this world is not going to GIVE God command.

So, everything old must become new. The Kingdom of God will not come from political improvements and ethics committees and more progressive laws, so that the race we call human comes to the next step in its “so-called” biological evolution. No, we must become a NEW creation. Start new. And that's what God's going to do.

Make a brand new creation, by making us brand new creatures. A totally new reality. And only God can do that.

But Paul says you and I, in the Church, already have become a new creation.

A race of persons has been created by the new birth...a human family that lives by faith. A race, a human family that is not at home in its own flesh, but is at home only when it is in fellowship with the Lord. We are a race that has already died and lives again. St Paul says that is US. The new creation. "If anyone is in Christ...Wow! Spirit...Water...Word...and behold, a new creation." Dying with Christ, in baptism, rising again, living a new life, with Christ.

Think that's interesting? Here's what's exciting...there is more to what we are, in Christ, and have obtained, and can be, and can have, in this life, and the eternal one. But that's for another sermon.

Ah, but you say, I don't see THAT much change in Christians, to call them a new creation. Ah, but I say back, it is like the Seed Growing in the Ground...the parable that is in our Gospel lesson today. The Seed growing secretly in the ground is totally controlled by God. The seed is in the ground.

Like the seed, the Christian sprouts. The Christian grows. We don't know how. Then the stalk appears. And the head of grain. Then the full grain. And then we can talk about it being, becoming mature.

The Christian grows mysteriously, secretly, like a seed in the ground; it does not produce itself, or its own growth. But God knows how to grow it up, up until it is done...until it (he or she) is ready for the harvest.

The local church on the corner you know about, grows in much the same way. It doesn't look like much. It is often not impressive. People inside believe sometimes they must work and work and work to make their church grow.

But it is up to God to make it grow, if it should grow. It is only on the church membership to pray, and then tend the seed, that is, God's word proclaimed everywhere and every "when" they can. Then they can sleep and rise, and sleep and rise, and while at rest, God produces the harvest.

And one day, God will gather in the harvest, of souls. That is not our work. "It's not my job," as some people say. So the size of the harvest of souls, and the timing, comes from the seed growing, by the hand of God only. We are just to rejoice. Rest. Praise Him. Thank Him.

So why do we struggle? Why be discouraged? Do you feel under pressure, like many pastors,

to produce more and bigger membership numbers, budgets, and building improvements? Well, the growing of the Kingdom of God cannot be stopped by us nor can it be started or jump-started or even speeded up.

I shake my head when I hear of pastors who are studying the latest corporation rules of growth so that they may follow a business model, so that they may grow their church like it was a corporation.

Don't they know, that mere men cannot change the harvest time?

But look at it THIS way. The church now may seem to be insignificant, but meanwhile, its power in service may be great! A little local church may remain small, but it can be great in service, with acts of faith and love.

A congregation like this one can even become a place where, like in the parable, the littlest mustard seed bush can become a sheltering shade tree, serving all who stop by to rest under its branches.

The insignificant local congregation can become a place where, like in the parable, the young may find a nest in its outspread branches that are offering shade, as it finds itself naturally serving, as only a new creation can, outpouring all it can of the life of God given in it, with all its little acts of faith and love, for all that come to it to find hope, and help, and a way to the maker and redeemer of all.

He is the only one who can cause all things to happen that we pray for, the only one who can make great things happen, out of a little, seed, and soil, and water.

Out of the smallest seed, YOU, and soil, and water. Praise God. Amen.