

Grace and Peace from God our Father and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

In seminary we learned about an ancient African personality profiling system called the enneagram which classifies personality types as animals. Unlike most systems which describe you by what you're attracted to, *the enneagram defines a person by what they seek to avoid. A couple of my friends turned out to be monkeys.* What monkeys seek to avoid with a passion is being ordinary. The Sundays after Pentecost are not tailor made for monkeys. They're called ordinary time. ***Ordinary time sounds to the ear like a let down.*** Like nothing of interest or importance will occur. I suppose if you had to classify modern culture, we could all be called monkeys because we all seek the extraordinary.

The Gospel lesson for today is surprisingly and properly placed within the period of the liturgical year known as ordinary time. For the gospel reading in and of itself is given over to the ordinary things of life. ***The parables Jesus tells this morning are about the ordinary things of life: seeds, planting and growing.*** It tells us that the Kingdom of God is like *a mustard seed*, the ***smallest of all seeds which grows into the greatest of all shrubs; they also happen to be everywhere in the Middle East.***

A GREAT SHRUB? The kingdom of God like a great shrub. Not a giant oak or a redwood, or even a Cedar of Lebanon. No. ***Jesus tells us the Kingdom is like the ORDINARY growing into the insignificant.***

Let's face it! This is not an inspiring image. The ordinary doesn't seem very exciting. The ordinary things don't usually capture our attention or

take us by surprise.

But Jesus tells lots of stories using subjects that were ORDINARY to the people of his day. *He speaks of sheep, catching fish, salt, and light. Seeds being planted and sprouting and growing, the story we have today, is just one such story.*

"The Kingdom of God," Jesus says, "is like a mustard seed." It's the smallest of seeds and yet grows into the greatest of all shrubs – not the greatest of all trees – the greatest of all shrubs. While the image may not be very inspiring, Jesus' parable is inspired.

No doubt Jesus was outside near a mustard bush where a family of birds had chosen to make their nest. Jesus probably plucked a seed pod off of the bush, and pulled off a single tiny mustard seed.

"See this little seed? The Kingdom of God is like this mustard seed. It's the tiniest of seeds, and yet it grows into the greatest of shrubs, and puts forth branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."

What the parable doesn't tell us is that mustard shrubs were about as common as dandelions, while tall grand trees were few and far between in Palestine. And although one mighty tree might offer shelter than a mustard shrub, mustard shrubs – by virtue of their sheer number, ubiquity and commonness – provide far more shelter for the birds of the air than all the great trees.

I suggest that this morning Jesus tells us a great truth hidden behind a mustard shrub. *The Kingdom of God is not revealed and built up by*

the high, the mighty, the amazing the titillating, the extraordinary, but rather by ordinary things, ordinary people, ordinary acts, which perhaps taken individually may not make much of an impression, yet nonetheless *provide the shade of God's very real presence on this benighted world of ours.*

Think about it. Jesus used the ordinary things in life to talk about the Kingdom and it is through ordinary things that Jesus reveals the Kingdom to us. He chooses words spoken by *ordinary people*, words to tell the story and name his name. *He uses water as a sign of the kingdom, of cleansing and rebirth.* He chose the stuff we drink, the stuff we cook in, the stuff we bathe in and brush our teeth with to be Holy and significant. He *chose simple gifts of bread and wine, the things common in every household, staples, bread, daily food he uses as a sign of his presence among us.*

Jesus takes the ordinary, words, water, bread and wine, and he uses them in an extraordinary way.

It is precisely in these everyday gifts of word and water, bread and wine, that Jesus makes himself and his kingdom known. It isn't in the extravagant and in the grandiose. *The extraordinary thing Jesus did for us – He died so that we might live.* In his death and resurrection there is hope and promise for each one of us. That hope and promise is made know in the words and water of Holy Baptism and in Holy Communion in the ordinary events in our Christian lives.

And what of us? We may feel ordinary and insignificant. Yet, though our lives may seem ordinary, ***the Good News is that we are God's***

chosen instruments for bearing witness to the Kingdom of God. Even though we may feel as common and insignificant as mustard seed, ***GOD CAN USE US to provide very real shelter in this world for someone.***

And it is in our small ordinary acts of love and discipleship that we bring Christ to others. You may not be a towering oak, or a majestic redwood, or a cedar of Lebanon, ***but Jesus tells us that the mustard shrub provides enough shade for the birds to nest in.***

Ordinary time reminds us that ***what is truly holy is what happens after Sunday in our ordinary Monday through Saturday living. Jesus reminds us today that our lives are made holy in ORDINARY TIME & WAYS.***

Our ministry is to and with ordinary people, People like you and me, people who live in small towns and country villages, people who live in large metropolitan areas with meandering suburbs, people who live in poor, poor, poverty stricken regions of the world.

There really isn't room for us to say, "I'm just this," or "I can't do that because, I'm too this or too that." ***What's blessed is the ordinary, and we who have received God's ordinary gifts of word, water, bread and wine minister to lots of other people in simple, unpredictable,*** Ordinary ways.

Often people are impressed with dazzling fountains and worship spaces as big as football fields filled with ecstatic worshippers, and that's all fine, but if someone needs a cup of water, one other person to give a hug and show loving concern for them, the fountains and masses of people look more like giant oaks, redwoods, or cedar of Lebanon, than a mustard shrub, and all they're looking for is a little shelter.

I suppose we could seek to avoid the ordinary like so many do these days, but why would we, but why would we? Ordinary is where it's at. The kingdom of God, I mean.

AMEN!!