**3rd Sunday after Pentecost Lectionary 11, Year B**

May each day you become a new creation in Christ, surrender your human view for one in the Spirit. Amen.

 Last week, we heard about the spirit of faith and how we witness that in our everyday lives. This week, our readings continue the theme of God’s work in the world by using lots of creation imagery.

If you were to pick an image to help you describe God, what would you choose? What picture comes to your mind when thinking about God? When I was writing my final big paper for my Spiritual Director certification, we had to answer that question. My image for God was as the Farmer or Master Gardener who knows just what seeds go with what kind of soil, who prepares each for the best possible bearing of fruit, who lovingly cares for the seed, soil, sprout and plant and who knows just the right time for harvesting. So, what would be a good representation of God for you?

 How about a tree? Ezekiel has us visualizing the majestic cedar tree. God will take from one cedar to plant another. It’s purpose is to provide sanctuary and protection for birds of all kind. This image of the tree is the vision of the power of God. Notice in that reading that it is all about God, not humans- what God can and will do and all will know it. The Lord speaks and it is done. The psalmist also uses the cedar. To be “planted” in the house of the Lord, to flourish like the palm and spread like the cedar. If you are a person of a “certain age”, you may especially appreciate verse *14they shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be green and succulent;* - good news indeed!. Other images are music of the lyre and harp and a rock in whom there is no injustice.

Jesus, in Mark’s gospel, is using parables of sowing and growing; of seeds and soil to illustrate the Kingdom or Reigning of God. Seeds scattered that sprout and grow without the farmer knowing exactly how it was accomplished, simply that it was. And it was done in steps- first the stalk, then head then grain then harvest time. Or a mustard seed- very tiny yet, like the cedar, growing large in order to offer protection and sanctuary. This is the work of God, the work of God’s kingdom. This was probably a comfort to the people to whom Mark was writing- an anxious community trying to figure out how to respond to the destruction of the temple and to the circumstances to which they found themselves. Should they be subservient to the Romans authority? Should they fight or rebel? What kind of witness should they bear? Mark is offering a third option- following Jesus and deeply trusting God to work out God’s promises. In other words, they didn’t have to have a complete plan and understand it all. They weren’t in control, God was. They could not create or engineer the Kingdom of God to become a reality- that’s God’s job. They were not to make it happen by trying to be the soil or the seed. Their job was to be the sower, to be faithful and keep scattering the seeds. In that, they would bear fruit.

Paul, instead of using specific images, encourages the Corinthian church to walk by faith, not by sight. Again, as disciples, the focus is on how we live out our purpose. As called, named and claimed beloved children of God, the purpose is to live in that identity. Paul says, *16From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!* We use that last part when we participate in Holy Baptism. We have come to associate it as we becoming a new creation in the waters of baptism. It is that but more. We no longer regard from a human perspective and with human standards- that means we assess how we look at the world and the people in it; our families, our communities, our values, our work, our laws. We become new, re-formed, new creations. But in order for that to happen, *everything old has passed away,* to be let go, to die in order for resurrection to take place. Instead of walking by our sight and our plans, we walk by faith, called to surrender to being made new (not making ourselves new). We live by faith, see with the eyes of faith, faith in the Spirit, observing and recognizing the wonder and works of God, the reigning and kingdom of God. And in this living, we need to be clear that it is not easy or done overnight or by following some preset plan. Like the sower, we don’t really know how it happens, we just show up and do our part. It’s difficult and it can be painful- loss, transitions and death usually are. They often involve the loss of ideas and dreams and well-known practices. It’s a process, happening in steps- first the stalk then the head then the grain.

This is the good news! This is the promise of growth we are given. This is the Spirit working in us to make us new- planted in the Lord, growing strong and spreading out, bearing fruit and living out our purpose to be fearless, faithful proclaimers of Christ. And as we grow and live out that life we are called to, as we seek to build the Kingdom through our words and actions, others will see our witness and join in. Not because we did it just right and proper but because the Kingdom of God has come near, God is at work and we are excited to share the good news with others.

So whatever image speaks to you- soil, seeds, trees, rocks, wind, fire, water, melodies, harmonies- use it to recognize God’s presence, see the Kingdom all around, continually allow God to help you become that new creation and bear fruit- to the glory of God!

Amen.