

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

Ezekiel 17:22-24

Psalm 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Mark 4:26-34

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During World War II, American civilians of all ages were urged by their government to collect materials like tin, rubber and iron for the war effort. Apparently, much of the stuff ultimately went unused. For years after the war, there were rumors of warehouses bulging with the materials that had been so painstakingly collected. The real purpose of the whole enterprise had been to make as many people as possible feel invested in the war. Today, something similar goes on in schools when lessons about the terrible consequences of environmental degradation conclude with the class trooping out to the field behind the school to plant a tree.

I suppose the only danger of these exercises would be if those taking part had an exaggerated sense of the importance of their role. A Cub Scout troop in Kankakee, Illinois might have despaired, thinking that because they had collected 26 fewer tin cans than the month before, D-Day would have to be postponed. Or there might be panic at the local school, with students fearful that the world's oxygen supply is threatened because old Mr. Perkins backed over the Earth Day tree with the school riding mower.

The farmer in our Gospel today apparently has such an exaggerated notion of the importance of his role. He doubtless believes he is growing crops, but Jesus makes it clear that all the farmer has really done is

scatter the seeds. Our Lord insists, “Of its own accord the land yields fruit, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the grain is ripe, [the farmer] wields the sickle at once, for the harvest has come.” That’s the way it is with the kingdom of God. We rightly regard it as our responsibility to help build the Kingdom. But it’s really God who brings it about. It’s much the same as with school projects. Everyone knows that all those castles made of sugar cubes and Viking villages made of Popsicle sticks aren’t made by the kids themselves. They’re made by parents with degrees in architecture or theatre arts. Children know that their contribution to the project is to smile, look attentive and periodically bring fresh beverages from the refrigerator.

We human beings don’t have to build the kingdom of God. Which is fortunate, because history has shown we aren’t up to it. There is no need to despair in the midst of our failure to make it happen. Ultimately, the Kingdom is God’s doing. God will get us where we’re going. Our role is to scatter the seeds, to co-operate, and to look, with hope, for the day when the harvest has come.