

Introduction: Have you ever looked at a cedar tree? I mean, walked up and felt its bark, climbed its branches, or examined its leaves? Most cedar trees don't have an oval leaf, but a thin strand-like needle you can hold on your pinky finger. They're really rather small, and extremely tiny in comparison to the rest of the tree. But the cedars of Lebanon can grow to be over ten feet in diameter and some, a hundred feet tall.

Our Lord Jesus describes the mustard plant as *"the smallest of all the seeds on earth. . . becomes larger than all the garden plants"* (4:31-32). The sower scatters tiny seed to become a mighty thirty-foot canopy (4:3&26). The sower takes the *"young twig"* from the topmost branches, and it becomes a mighty cedar.

The Lord God starts with ordinary means to do great things, just as a tiny seed becomes a towering tree. The infant Jesus was Himself a tiny seed, knit together in His mother's womb, organs and all little limbs (Ps. 139:13). And yet this ordinary human boy is the *"shoot from the stump of Jesse"* (Is. 11:1): the *"righteous branch for David"* (Jer. 23:5).

Wouldn't it be great if our Christmas trees were mustard plants? The kingdom of God begins like a mustard seed. Jesus grew in stature and in wisdom (Lk. 2:52), *"first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain"* appeared (4:28): His life and ministry, and then His suffering, death, and resurrection. The full grain of the kingdom of God is the crucifixion given for you, wherein Jesus *"puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in [His] shade"* (4:32b).

This isn't new imagery either, for Ezekiel confesses the same about the kingdom of God: *"On the mountain height of Israel will I plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar"* (17:23a). Jesus manifested His glory at the mountain of His Transfiguration, and became a noble cedar. At His Baptism, Our Lord manifested the Kingdom of God; and He took the suffering of the world to the tree.

The woman's offspring, the seed which the pre-incarnate Christ promised to the serpent's face (Gen 3:15), became flesh, dwelt among us (Jn. 1:14), and fulfilled all the words of Scripture. The tree on which Jesus was lifted up has become the greatest tree of all time, for that is where the mighty works of God were done: *"It is finished!"* was His cry (Jn. 19:30).

And after the Lord's ascension: the shoot of Jesse, the branch for David, the cedar of Ezekiel now towers over all the heavens and the earth, and all who dwell in it. Those in Christ are the *"new creation,"* you are the new creation (2Cor 5:17). **You** Christians are the *"birds of every sort"* who rest in the branches of the kingdom (17:23b). You rest in the cool shade of the flourishing tree which Christ hung upon. You receive rest in the nest of Christ's church, here on earth (4:32b). From this earthly tent

you catch a glimmer of the heavenly dwelling which is already yours by Christ's resurrection (2Cor 5:1&5).

But "*while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened,*" burdened by the troubles of what will come this year, by the troubles of what we have now, and by the troubles that we ourselves have caused in the past (2Cor 5:4).

Sometimes it seems like there's not much else to do but complain about what work we will have to do. Not much else to do besides worry about our clothes and if we're making a good enough impression. Not much else to consider besides whether we've made a mortal mistake in how we speak to others. Groaning in such a tent is like living your life in a car with no AC during a 110 degree heat wave. It's certain death, to live without the green sap of the living tree (17:24), without the tender sprig from the top of the cedar tree (17:22).

But the sower who art in heaven knows what He is doing, and you don't have to understand cedar needles or God's gifts for them to be truly given and shed for you. He answers your prayer for the Kingdom to come, and all that you "*birds of every sort*" have to do: is rest on His glorious branches, there in that pew, here at this rail. The seeds of your sin are dwarfed by the size of God' mustardy kingdom. The sower does not leave us unclothed in our naked sins of murder, adultery, and idolatry (2Cor 5:4), but further clothes us by the garments washed white in the blood of His Son (Rev. 7:14).

When Jesus walked down the streets of Jerusalem and taught all things in Scripture concerning Himself, He gave life to the sick and forgave sin. Take good courage (2Cor 5:6&8), because you rest in His branches, for the mustard seed has grown, the grain is ripe: Our Lord is doing the same for you. It's the Lord's great and mighty works of salvation, His crucifixion and resurrection, which keeps you birds in the air. **The tree of His Kingdom towers over you, and His Holy Word feeds you here in His nest. Amen.**