

Proper 6, Year B
4th Sunday after Pentecost

Good morning! It's Pride Month. What is Pride Month? When my parents moved to a community where planting was restricted to flowers and shrubs – God forbid vegetables – Daddy found a flat of marigolds where a tomato seed must have fallen in; he and my mother rejoiced in the generous crop of unexpected cherry tomatoes throughout the summer. Pride Month is our time to set aside and remember family and friends who have given their lives for being honest. Pride Month is when we need to ponder in our hearts the importance of whether God is black, white, red, yellow, male, female, Episcopal or Presbyterian; Pride Month is God saying I'm scattering seed and I'm not sure what's going to come up, but whatever it is, it will be mine and I will love it. Pride Month is a time to thank God for the richness we enjoy because we are different, one from another.

While God is watching the garden to see what's going to come up, my eyes were for many years focused on the ground as I drove or walked through forested areas of Maine. In addition to seeing some of the pathways four-legged creatures frequented, it proved to be a highly effective system for scouting out deer and especially moose when driving at night, since moose rarely if ever look into a car's headlights; you just watch the road and can pretty successfully see the lower half of those incredibly tall legs, rather graceful for a creature of 900+ pounds. The deer rarely travel alone: where there's one leaping in front of your car, there will be at least one more coming after, if not the whole family. But then, when we lived for a year on the banks of the Penobscot River, my focus changed to "up" - even sneaking quick peeks when driving – because of the regular sightings of bald eagles and osprey and their nests: those magnificent birds with wing-spans that seemed not much shorter than the length of our camp on Lake Mooselookmeguntic. All creatures of our God and King.

There's a reason I was unable to be here last week to bless the Garden and Ramp, beyond the fact that God locked me out of my car. Just look at our Lectionary readings! Planting, pruning, seeds, branches. There's a book whose title *The Country of the Pointed Firs* always make me think of the drive along New Hampshire's Route 16 which follows the Androscoggin River on your way to Errol and on to the Rangeley area; if you're lucky enough to be there around midnight on a clear night when you're not watching for moose legs, you can watch the pointy firs lining the moonlit river. I believe it is just such a sprig we hear about in Ezekiel:

I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar, I will set it out; I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.

You will sleep at night and rise in the day and will not know how the sprig grows; it is the smallest, yet it will grow into the greatest of all shrubs and birds will nest in its branches.

What is the significance of all this for us? I believe God plants what we his children-by-adoption refer to as churches - mosques, synagogues, houses of worship, sacred spaces - from tiny seed, as tiny as a mustard seed which Mark says is the tiniest and grows to be the greatest of shrubs. We do not know what makes them grow, but we worry about them night and day, hoping that they grow, that they reach more people, that they shelter, comfort, remain steadfast in faith and love; that they speak honestly the truth with boldness and administer justice with compassion. After all is said and done, what does God require of each of us? **To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God, says the prophet Micah.** The tender, new growth on the end of a young twig which itself extends from the firmly established tree of long-standing tradition – our sacred spaces, churches, synagogues, mosques - God will take and place in the ground at the top of a mountain for all the world to watch as they come of age, as they produce tender babes of their own and become shelters for “winged creatures of every kind.” When the sojourner comes, looking for cover from storms, comfort in

sorrow, the adopted children of God will welcome them. In the words of Exodus: You shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; Christ died for all so that those who live might live no longer for themselves alone, Corinthians says. Everything we do is of God and affects someone other than ourselves. Our own delight in watching as our gardens grow is insignificant compared to what those gardens provide for others: the opportunity for re-creation given to earth's creatures, the food and shelter they may bring forth, an interruption in the continuous noise and ceaseless busy-ness we have inflicted upon God's world. And when we become too proud of our accomplishments and ourselves, when we forget who makes those gardens grow, God puts us in a place of humility where we are face to face with our utter dependence upon God.

All things come from God: all things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee. You give us the seeds and bulbs and twigs, the knowledge of where and how best to plant them, an understanding of what they need in terms of food, water, light and shade, and then the patience to watch them come to fruition.

All the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord.

All people that on earth do dwell, know that the Lord is God indeed.

Let the Redeemer's name be sung through every land, by every tongue.