

**APPENDIX I:
HOMILY FOR THE CONVENTION EUCHARIST**

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ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

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COOPERATING WITH GOD’S SUBVERSIVE ABUNDANCE

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The first spring our family lived in Boston, to our great surprise, flowers began to sprout from a still-frozen hill in our backyard. First the brave crocuses, then scattered hyacinth and daffodils, undeterred by an April Nor’easter. Next came elegant tulips, a vibrant forsythia bush, delicate lilies of the valley, bleeding hearts, lilacs, on and on throughout the season. Peering through the kitchen windows each morning in anticipation, we would inspect what new, mature perennials had miraculously appeared. We eventually learned one of our home’s previous owners had been a botanist. My favorites, fuchsia peonies, tend to bloom late, in early June. Their lifespan is so brief I pray I’m not away at a conference lest I miss their lush abandon. This spring symphony unfolds as sheer gift, reemerging annually through no real effort of our own. It offers stunning signs of rebirth, of hope, and abundance.

So too in today’s parable of the growing seed (or the seed that grows of itself), which appears only in Mark’s gospel, we are reminded of how God initiates the reign’s ongoing growth in our midst: quietly yet vividly, scarcely depending on our hard work or theological insights. “Of its own accord the land yields fruit” (Mk 4:28). Academic formation and professional culture reward careful, concerted effort according to metrics of individual productivity. We are trained to “verify” rather than to trust with the patience of the person scattering seed, even as he or she “knows not how” it grows (Mk 4:27), or to linger in the mystery of God’s reign not yet present in its fullness. Jesus’ parable invites us to attend to the stealthy and surprising ways God is at work in and around us—to plant seeds with our very lives for future blooms we may not ourselves wake up to enjoy, for harvests we may never reap. The vocation of teaching offers regular reminders that we plant seeds without knowing whether or how they may bear fruit down the road. Amid our wider results-driven, instant-gratification culture, what might each of us be invited to clear or prune—or simply take time to notice—in order to allow God’s transforming love to be planted in our lives and our communities?

The pairing of Ezekiel in the first reading with the gospel's second parable of the mustard seed reminds us that God's reign is also subversive, inverting worldly expectations that align power and even "right" with "might." In Mark's version the mustard seed grows into "a plant" rather than a tree, as in Luke's, such that this image of growth from a miniscule seed into a shrub providing "large branches" that offer a dwelling place for birds strikes us as improbable and even absurd (Mk 4:32). In Ezekiel the majestic cedar that will likewise "shelter birds of every kind" originates in a tender shoot, showcasing how YHWH "lift[s] up the lowly tree" (Ez 17:24).

Maybe some of you have beings in your lives who also used to be tiny and now tower over you. Unlikely sources such as these can provide remarkable, sometimes humbling wisdom. It is often fairly distinct from the knowledge we build by consulting experts. There is a disclosive power in the transparency of the young or in the perspective of the newcomer. We can miss God's ongoing promptings if we seek insights only from the established or credentialed, rather than from tender shoots in our midst. Just as today's arboreal metaphors challenge expectations about the traditionally powerful and majestic, we, who cooperate with the inbreaking of God's reign, are also called to transform structures that oppress and to empower those marginalized. For what we do in our bodies will matter for our judgment, Paul cautions, even as we long for our true home between the times. Whether offering the hospitality and solace of shade, shining light on things that needs exposure, cultivating a just peace and planetary survival, or nourishing one another at longer tables, it is through our concrete, embodied tending that we join our labors with God's.

Ezekiel's prophecy anticipates YHWH's restoration of the defeated Davidic monarchy, raising up a new king under whom Israel would thrive: a noble cedar offering protection to all nations. The imagery conveys both continuity and discontinuity, linking the cedar of Israel to an existing cedar, through the use of its twig, but also contrasting the other trees of the field with the grandeur of the cedar of Israel and YHWH's ability to "wither up the green tree" and "make the withered tree bloom" (Ez 17:24). Ezekiel writes at a time when Judah's sins had brought the people low, and yet the patience and mercy of YHWH here subvert expectations of vengeance, particularly appearing as it does amid the oracles of punishment.

Today's readings, then, remind us that God upends our expectations and our careful plans in a host of ways. They offer courage to all of us who are small in our efforts, but also issue a warning to those of us tempted by certitude about the contours of God's reign. Perhaps we are tempted by standard models of authority, rigid paradigms, or our own high control needs. The church, too, can be tempted by forms of power or exclusionary righteousness that neglect the nature of a hope borne of a humble shrub or a stable birth in the borderlands—a concrete, lifegiving hope for those disinherited and cast out. A prophetic hope that calls disciples of Christ to come and live another way. A yet-unfulfilled hope that we joyfully await.

We used to live in California, which has a far longer growing season. We planted vegetables in our manicured raised beds, and we installed a drip irrigation system to minimize water waste. But the unexpected yields of our sledding hill in New England, somewhere between "Third Winter" and Summer, summon us to cooperate with the extravagant, subversive abundance God sows in our shared lives every day.