



Pentecost 4

June 17, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

**Theme: In Christ, the “Tender Sprig,” You Are Living A
New Life in His *Wonderful New World!***

Sermon Text: Ezekiel 17:22-24

²² “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. ²³ On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. ²⁴ All the trees of the forest will know that I the LORD bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.

“I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it.”

complementary devices that attend them. Apple's logo also denotes success and enormous wealth in view of Apple's performance in the marketplace. It's hard to imagine a world without Apple or Samsung or Dell.

Have you ever misplaced your cell phone? For most users, their cell phone has become a constant companion, and even its temporary loss creates great anxiety.

Our text uses a symbol or an icon, namely, a **"tender sprig"** from the **"topmost shoots"** of a mighty **"cedar,"** to communicate a whole world of meaning. To understand how it invites us to see and enter a world more lasting and wonderful than the world of technology, it's important to consider the context. If we grasp the meaning of a **"tender sprig"** in context, far greater anxieties will be relieved than those we experience when we lose our cell phone!

The context is very significant. The prophet Ezekiel utters these words from exile in Babylon. God had warned His people through the prophets that their continued apostasy would bring judgment. In the 8th century before Christ, Amos and Hosea had warned the leaders and people of the Northern Kingdom of Israel that their idolatry and worship of Baal would result in their destruction. They warned that the holy and righteous God of Israel would not tolerate their rebellion indefinitely. But, alas, all of Israel's kings, and the vast majority of the people, refused to heed these prophetic warnings. God's promises are always fulfilled. The Northern Kingdom of Israel and its capital city, Samaria, were conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. Its inhabitants were scattered throughout that Empire never to return.

In the south, God had formerly sent Micah and Isaiah—also 8th century prophets—to warn Jerusalem and Judah that their day of reckoning was nigh as well for the very same reasons God had visited His judgment on their northern neighbors. Now Ezekiel, along with his contemporary, Jeremiah, was called to announce the certain destruction of Jerusalem. Like their prophetic predecessors, events would demonstrate that Yahweh's word thru Ezekiel and Jeremiah would come to pass. Jerusalem—that great, historic city where God had chosen to dwell in His temple ([1 Kings 9:3](#)), was conquered by the Babylonians in 586-587 BC.

The depth and darkness of the Southern Kingdom's apostasy is described in [2 Kings 23](#)—an episode during the reform of godly King Josiah: **"The king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the keepers of the threshold to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels for Baal, Asherah, and for all the hosts of heaven"** (v. 4). The civil and religious authorities had actually set up statutes in Yahweh's temple to practice the worship of false gods. Their idolatry was abhorrent and flagrant! Ezekiel, with Jeremiah, proclaims God's words of judgement and destruction. Judgement will come upon Jerusalem ([Chapters 4-7](#)), its corrupted temple ([chapters 8-11](#)), the political and religious leaders ([chapters 13-24](#)) and upon the foreign nations ([chapters 25-32](#)).

It's in this foreboding context that the LORD's promise of the **"tender sprig"** is delivered by Ezekiel: **"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches."**

The contrast couldn't be more compelling and stark! While Ezekiel's horizon from end to end is filled with judgment and destruction upon an idolatrous city and people, this **"tender**

“sprig” points beyond to a new, amazing epoch—inaugurated by a specific individual. A **wonderful new world** is promised and on its way!

Ezekiel’s promise speaks directly to us who find ourselves in a very similar context. Idolatry surrounds us as our cultural elites embrace every form of immorality and refuse to heed God’s call for a life of contrition and repentance. The most horrific and visible sign of this idolatrous paganism is the murderous practice of abortion. The blood of millions of these innocent victims cries out to heaven like Abel’s innocent blood did after he was murdered by his brother Cain. How similar to what was happening in Ezekiel’s day. We read that Josiah, in his efforts to cleanse and to restore the temple worship exclusively to Yahweh, **“defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnon, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech”** (2 Kings 23:10).

We’re called to view our world thru the eyes of Ezekiel and his fellow prophets. God delivers His holy will and Word thru them. Idolatry and evil seem so potent while the faithful’s position appears so feeble. Ezekiel beheld Jerusalem’s demise. Those who confessed Yahweh as the only true God seemed so marginalized and weak. Still today, Christians who uphold the claims of sacred Scripture and confess Jesus to be the only way to God’s mercy and grace are often held in contempt with zero standing in society. Many are even brash enough to label classic Christian morality mere bigotry. Beyond such verbal abuse, thousands of Christians have been publicly martyred in recent times, and there’s no less notice of this tragedy than a celebrity’s birthday or a White House press conference.

But Ezekiel leads us beyond despair and the apparent victory of the prevailing culture to a **wonderful new world** where all will know that the Lord has acted to rescue His redeemed sons and daughters. And the **“tender sprig”** will be His agent to achieve this great reversal. God’s sure Word and promise provides a climax to this chapter: **“I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it.”** God’s promise of Ezekiel is precisely that of **Hebrews 12**, where we’re encouraged to **“fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Who, for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart”** (vv. 2-3).

Jesus is the **“tender sprig”**! In Jesus, God graciously positions you in a **wonderful new world** where there is a peace that no powers of this world can ever provide. It’s a profound peace that puts our hearts and souls at rest no matter what storms swirl around us. As Jesus says, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid”** (John 14:27). At the center of such other-worldly peace are the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. His holy life and His atoning death have delivered us from the world of darkness and death to His **wonderful new world** of abundant life now and eternal life forever in heaven. He pardons us, removes our guilt and removes the filthy rags of our righteousness!

In Christ, the “Tender Sprig,” You Are Living A New Life in His Wonderful New World!

In **2 Corinthians 5:1-5**—today’s second lesson—we heard the Apostle Paul as he yearned to experience that **wonderful new world** in all its fullness:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Yes, God promise thru Ezekiel has been fulfilled. The **“tender sprig”** has come! Jesus Christ is that **“tender sprig.”** He has lifted up the lowly and built an **“eternal house in heaven”** for each of us in God’s *wonderful new world* above. Amen.