

Cedars of Lebanon

Proper 6, Year B, RCL, Track 2. Ezekiel 17:22-24. Psalm 92:1-4,11-14. 2 Corinthians 5,6-10,[11-13],14-17. Mark 4:26-34. June 17, 2018. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem and Trinity, Alliance. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

For several years Julie and I lived in a little white bungalow in Charlottesville, Virginia. In the front yard there were two magnificent evergreen trees. I was not familiar with that particular kind of tree, and I was amazed when the landlord said they were deodars.

Deodars are rather exotic on this side of the Atlantic. They are native to the Himalaya Mountains. They are one of only four true cedar trees (or maybe there is only one kind of true cedar tree with several varieties; they all come from the same general area, central Asia and the region around the Mediterranean Sea). The other kinds are the Cyprus cedar, which grows on the island of Cyprus, the Atlas Cedar, which is native to the Atlas Mountains of North Africa, and the cedar of Lebanon, which is native to Lebanon and Turkey. All these trees are important as timber trees, and they are magnificent in their full growth, attaining legendary age and beauty.

Especially the cedar of Lebanon. It's famous from the Bible. Solomon built his temple using cedar wood from Lebanon, and there are many other allusions to that tree, including prominent mention in today's Old Testament reading and psalm. The flag of the country of Lebanon prominently features a cedar tree.

I've seen cedars of Lebanon in their full mature glory. There are a

bunch of them in Virginia at Montpelier, the estate that used to belong to James Madison, one of the most famous and influential of America's founding fathers. At least one of those trees dates back to when James Madison was actually there. They are imposing in a manner worthy of Mr. Madison himself. They really get your attention.

So when cedars of Lebanon appear in the Bible, they are supposed to really get our attention. They stand for magnificence, nobility, durability and abundance. The older trees are not only tall but thick in the trunk and wide in the branches; they "spread abroad," as Psalm 92 says. The things God does, and especially people who cooperate with God, have the long-lasting, expansive, flourishing quality emblemized by cedars of Lebanon. They are impressive, valuable, well-established.

That's what God wants for us. Paying attention to God and going along with his values and purposes gives us the qualities of cedars of Lebanon. And though even the most magnificent and well-established cedar tree will eventually come to an end, the qualities it represents will not. Those qualities are grounded in God.

God values and preserves the good in human life not only through the cycle of birth and growth but through resurrection to new life. New cedar trees of all varieties are always coming along somewhere, to preserve the species through sequential existence. But our existence, though sequential in the sense that there are always children coming along somewhere, is also grounded in God through the life of the resurrected Christ. We who pay attention to God and go along with his values and purposes have an existence—and an influence—not limited to this earthly life. Hence the importance of our attitude and behavior on all occasions, as St. Paul remarks in

today's reading from Second Corinthians: "all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ." (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Cedar trees cannot choose whether or not to be magnificent; they just are, if they survive to maturity. We get to choose how we grow. God's call is to a magnificent maturity in Christ. We are called to spread abroad God's steadfast love, joy, justice, mercy and truth like splendid cedars of Lebanon.