Worship Resources for October 11th, 2020—Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 32:1-14 and Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Isaiah 25:1-9 and Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

Narrative Lectionary: Golden Calf, Exodus 32:1-14 (Luke 23:34)

This week, both the first selection of the Revised Common Lectionary and the Narrative Lectionary reading are one in the same: Exodus 32:1-14. Despite all the reminders that God, who had led them out of Egypt and out of their oppression, was still with them, the people turned to Aaron while Moses was up the mountain. They claimed they didn’t know what happened to Moses and were impatient to know what gods to worship, so Aaron fashioned a golden calf out of their gold and said, “Here are your gods who brought you out of Egypt!” He even declared a festival to the Lord but used the image of the calf in place for God. God tells Moses to get down the mountain, because these people have turned away from God already. God decides that the people need to be destroyed. God tells Moses to step out of the way, and God will make a new nation out of him, but Moses intervenes. What will the Egyptians say about God, if God destroys the very people brought out of Egypt? Moses reminds God of the promises made to their ancestors, that their descendants would be as numerous as the stars. God then changes their mind about destroying the people of Israel.

The psalmist begins in Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23 by praising God, who is like no other. The psalmist calls upon God to remember both themselves and the people of Israel, to deliver the people and allow the psalmist to witness their deliverance so they may rejoice in God. However, the psalmist acknowledges that the people and their ancestors have sinned. In vs. 19-23, the psalmist specifically recalls the sin of forgetting that God was the one who had delivered the people from oppression in Egypt, making a golden calf to worship. If it were not for Moses’ intervention, standing in the breach, the people would have perished from God’s wrath.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of what God has done for the powerful and for the lowly in 25:1-9. God has destroyed the cities of the powerful, the cities of their enemies. The powerful and strong foreign enemies who once lived in palaces now glorify God instead of themselves. God has instead been a shelter for those in need, a refuge for the poor. The prophet beholds a vision of God, who has prepared a feast on the mountain of God: rich foods and well-aged wines. God has destroyed the shroud over the people, swallowing up death, comforting those who mourn. God is the one who has saved the people, and the prophet calls upon the people to rejoice in their salvation.

The ancient psalm of comfort is often read at funerals and other times of distress, a reminder throughout the ages that God is with us. Psalm 23, the Shepherd’s Psalm, reminds the listener that God is like a shepherd who leads the sheep to green pastures and cool waters of rest. God is the one who leads us through the valley of the shadow, and no evil shall cause us to be afraid, because God continues to remain with us. We will eat the feast God has prepared for us, even before our enemies. God fulfills our lives to the point of an abundance that runs over, and we will live with God forever.

Paul returns to a personal matter in Philippians 4:1-9. Before this, Paul had spoken about the divisions from outside missionaries coming and preaching a different Gospel, but Paul knows about an inner conflict between two members of the congregation, Eudoia and Syntyche. We do not know what the conflict was about, but Paul urges them to be of the same mind, and urges the leaders of the church, one of whom he names, Clement, to help them, for they are all co-workers together. Paul encourages the leaders and the whole church to rejoice, knowing that Christ’s peace is with them, and to know that God is with them.

Jesus continues with another parable in Matthew 22:1-14, comparing the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet which a king gave for his son, but none of the people invited would attend. Some even murdered the king’s servants, so the king sent out his soldiers to destroy and burn the cities of those who had harmed his servants. Then the king sent the servants out again, this time to go invite anyone they found to the banquet, because those invited had refused to come. The wedding hall was filled with the uninvited guests. But then the king noticed a man there not wearing a wedding robe. The king asked him, “Friend, how did you get in?” The man was speechless, but the king had him bound and thrown into the outer darkness. Jesus concludes that many are called, but few are chosen.

The Narrative Lectionary focus is the same as the first selection of the Revised Common Lectionary with Exodus 32:1-14, but the second selection is from Luke 23:34. Jesus intercedes on the cross on behalf of the people crucifying him, asking God to forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing, as Moses did for the people when they worshiped the golden calf.

God does not desire punishment. God does not desire destruction. While some scriptures show us God’s anger when the people turn away from God, the prophets such as Ezekiel and Jeremiah make it clear that God’s desire is not punishment, but restoration. However, the people must live with the consequences of their actions. If they turn back to God, there is hope for restoration. The prophets, from Moses all the way to Jesus, stood in the breach, and while we read these passages as deflecting God’s wrath, we are the ones reading, listening, and understanding today. Perhaps its for us, as it was for the listeners at the time, a reminder to turn away from evil and instead do good (Psalm 34:14). However, we must not be haughty. We must remember to be humble, that God Almighty is the one who desires for us to know God. If we think we belong just because of who we are, we may find the invitation rescinded. If we think we do not have to change outwardly, in how we act, in what we do, and it only matters if we accept the invitation, we have fooled ourselves.

Call to Worship (from Proverbs 9:1-6)
**Wisdom has built her house,**

**made the dinner, poured the wine, and set the table.**

**She has sent out her servants,**

**and issued the invitation from the highest point in the city.**

**“You that are simple, come in!**

**You without knowledge,**

**Come, eat of my bread**

**Drink the wine I have mixed**

**Abandon your simplistic ways and live,**

**Walk in the way of understanding.”**

**The banquet of God is set,**

**Wisdom has called us in,**

**And Jesus has made a place at the table.
Come, for all things are ready.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Inviting God, we confess that at times we have ignored your invitation. We’ve procrastinated, hemmed and hawed about Your ordinances and commandments, and at times simply have not wanted to accept Your gracious invitation to Your table. We want to have the places of honor and recognition, instead of loving and accepting our neighbors at the table, giving up our seat to make room for others. Forgive us. May we listen for Your invitation in a new way that breaks open our hearts, so that we might fully enjoy the table You have prepared for us, a table of wisdom and understanding, welcome and acceptance and love for all of Your people, all of Your children. May we humbly accept the invitation You have made to us through Jesus Christ, knowing that none of us are truly worthy, and yet, because of Your love, we all belong and have our place at the table. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Jesus took a child and placed it among his disciples, telling them that whoever welcomed one such child welcomed him. Beloved, you are God’s child. You are important. You matter. You are loved and needed and cherished. Know that your sins are forgiven, that there is nothing that can hold you back from God’s love, that breaks open our hearts and causes us to love with an even greater love than we can imagine. Go and share this good news, inviting others to join God’s wondrous circle of friends. Amen.

Prayer

Christ who intercedes, we pray that You would intercede for us. Remind us when we do not know what we are doing, how we may be causing harm to others. Call upon us to stop our hurtful ways. Step into the breach for us, to turn us back from deceit and ruin. Intercede in our lives. Rescue us from our selfishness, from our despair, from our indifference, from our desire for revenge—from all the things that may satisfy us in the short-term but cause long-term damage. Intercede, Christ Jesus, calling us to live into Your ways of forgiveness, reparation, and restoration. Amen.