Worship Resources for October 18, 2020—Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 33:12-23 and Psalm 99; Isaiah 45:1-7 and Psalm 96:1-9 (10-13); 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

Narrative Lectionary: God Answers Hannah, 1 Samuel 1:9-11, 19-20; 2:1-10 (Luke 1:46-55)

Moses asked to see God’s glory in Exodus 33:12-23. Moses, feeling some trepidation, perhaps because the people had turned to a golden calf while he was away because they didn’t know this God that led them out of Egypt, questioned whether God’s presence was with the people now. Moses told God that if he had found favor in God’s sight, God would make God’s presence known to him. God agreed, but told Moses that he would see only the goodness, graciousness, and mercy of God—no one could not see God’s face and live. So, God told Moses that God would put him on the rock, cover him with God’s hand, and pass by. Moses could see God’s backside (literally) but not God’s face. Instead, mercy, kindness, goodness, gratitude—these are the faces of God a human can see.

The psalmist praises God as the people’s king in Psalm 99. God as king is the lover of justice, the one who has established justice and equity in the people. The psalmist sings of how Moses and Aaron were the priests of God, along with Samuel. God heard their cries and came to them as a pillar of cloud. God answered them, for they kept God’s ordinances and statutes. The psalmist ends with a call to worship God on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to Cyrus on behalf of God in 45:1-7. Cyrus was the king of Persia, who allowed the exiled Israelites to return home. Cyrus was called God’s Anointed (Messiah), and God proclaimed that all barriers would be broken down for Cyrus by God, for the sake of Israel. Though Cyrus did not know God, God chose him, so that all people might know that God is the only God, the one who creates all things and brings light into being.

Psalm 96 is a song of praise, calling the people to sing to God who is the one to be praised. God is the one who is the king of all nations, of all peoples, who made everything. The psalmist calls upon the people to sing to all nations that God is the true king. All of creation shall sing for joy, for God is coming to judge the world, with righteousness and truth.

The Epistle readings turn to 1 Thessalonians. Paul began his introduction to the church in Thessalonica with an affirmation that God has chosen this church. Not only did they receive the word that Paul had brought to them, but the work of the Holy Spirit was manifest in them and the Thessalonians became an example to others in Macedonia and Achaia. These regions reported to Paul how the Thessalonians shared the Gospel by turning away from idols and worshiping only God, and waiting for Jesus to return.

When the religious leaders tried to trick Jesus in Matthew 22:15-22, they asked him if it was lawful to pay taxes or not. They sent some of their leaders along with the Herodians, who were loyal to Herod and the ideal of a re-established kingdom of Israel. Though the religious leaders were not necessarily loyal to Rome, they also didn’t want to stir up trouble with the Roman governor. Jesus called them hypocrites for putting him to the test, and asked them to show him a coin used to pay the tax and whose face was on the coin. When they responded that it was the emperor’s face, Jesus answered simply to give to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God what is God’s, reminding them that God’s reign was not of this world. They couldn’t think of more questions after that and left him alone.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on God answering Hannah’s prayer in 1 Samuel 1:9-11, 19-20, and 2:1-10. Hannah was one of Elkanah’s wives. The other wife had children, but Hannah was unable to conceive. In ancient times, this was a cause of ridicule and scorn, for only through children were names, titles, and inheritance passed down. God heard Hannah’s prayer. Hannah had promised to dedicate her firstborn son to God, to set him aside as a nazirite, who would not shave his head or drink alcohol but serve God. Hannah gave birth to a son, Samuel, and in 2:1-10 she praises God in song. She sings of how God is the one who answers the call of the woman unable to conceive, who raises up the poor, the needy from the ash heap to sit with princes, for God is the one of justice and equity.

Luke 1:46-55 contains Mary’s song of praise, which echoes Hannah’s song. Mary begins with her own praise for God who has chosen her, but the remainder of the song very much repeats what Hannah has sang: the God is the one who will bring justice, who remembers those who are left out, and will remember the faithful.

How do we live faithfully when we are uncertain? In 2020, we’re probably tired of the overused phrases “uncertain future” and “unprecedented times.” But it’s the truth: we live in these times, and our own certainty is questionable, our endurance lacking, our strength diminishing, our convictions lessening. Some religious leaders tried to trap Jesus in this thinking, but he reminded them, and reminds us, that we live in God’s kin-dom, a reign that is not of this world, though we are participating in it now. In a time when the phrase “mutual aid” is popping up in our communities, we with our Christian radar ought to hone in and recognize that it’s kin-dom work at hand: loving our neighbors as ourselves. Though Caesar has betrayed us again and again, we give to God what is God’s. We hear the prayer of Hannah, the song of Mary. It may be October, but it might do us good to hang on to Advent’s expectant hope and waiting. What’s a little more waiting time, right now, when everything is up in the air? Hopefully, we are learning again how to live faithfully. Moses never saw God, but saw God’s goodness, mercy, righteousness, and graciousness before him. We see that at work, too, and that gives us hope.

Call to Worship (Psalm 96:1-4)

**O sing to the LORD a new song;**

**sing to the LORD, all the earth.
Sing to the LORD, bless God’s name;**

**tell of God’s salvation from day to day.
Declare God’s glory among the nations,**

**God’s marvelous works among all the peoples.
For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;**

**God is to be revered above all.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of All, we confess that we have made idols of wealth, notoriety, and other worldly measures of success. As these idols are crashing down around us, we are losing hope, losing joy, losing faith. But You are the God above all. You are the One who leads us into Your reign, a kin-dom not of this world. You are the one who shows us how to truly live, by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Lead us into the true faith, O God, through Jesus Christ Your Son, who lived for us, who died for us, and lives again, teaching us to live into Your ways of love, justice, mercy, and peace. In these ways, we worship and live the true, abundant life You intended for us, now and into eternity. Amen and Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s faithfulness endures forever. God’s love never ends. God’s grace and mercy are always present to you through Jesus Christ. Repent; turn back to God’s ways, and know that forgiveness is there, right there, for you to claim. Love is in your heart, where it has always been. Mercy is at your grasp, ready for you to give it. Grace is in every moment, every breath you take. Live into God’s ways, and know God’s forgiveness, mercy, and love are with you, right now. Amen.

Prayer

Peace, Peace, O God. We crave it, we desire it, we long for it to become our reality in our lifetime. But we know peace cannot come without justice. May Your justice delay no longer, O God. May we pursue justice on behalf of those who are oppressed, marginalized, and rejected. May we pursue justice in our daily lives, for peace must begin with ourselves as we seek justice. May we find Your peace even as we dismantle the painfulness of racism in our lives. May Your peace be made known to us in the face of oppression and evil. May Your peace prevail in our hearts, in our waking up and lying down, in every breath, for peace is in Your presence. Through Your peace, break open our hearts to Your love, for peace and love must go together, and love demands justice. In seeking peace in our daily lives, may we live into the path You have led us, a path of hope and reconciliation that begins with justice and love. May we do this, and live, knowing You are with us, now and always, Prince of Peace. Amen.