Worship Resources for October 4th, 2020—Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 and Psalm 19; Isaiah 5:1-7 and Psalm 80:7-15; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46

Narrative Lectionary: The Promise of Passover, Exodus 12:1-13; 13:1-8 (Luke 22:14-20)

God spoke through Moses to give the commandments on Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. God reminded the people that God was the one who brought them out of their oppression in Egypt, no other god did this. God instructed the people on how they ought to live, in a way that remembered who they were, where they came from, and who God had called them to be. As a wandering people who could easily have been absorbed into other nations, God desired for them to remember who they were, and who their God was. The people were afraid, but Moses assured them that God’s desire was that they listen, learn, and live.

The psalmist sings praise to God, the Creator of everything in Psalm 19. The psalmist paints an image of the heavenly realm as understood in the ancient near East, and the heavens themselves speak of God’s glory. God the Creator is the one who gave the law to the people, and the law is more valuable than anything else in God’s creation. The psalmist concludes with a desire to follow God’s ways, to be kept from violating the commandments, and that their song is accepted by God.

God told a parable of a vineyard through the prophet Isaiah in 5:1-7. This is a parable in which God sings of the people as God’s beloved, who planted a vineyard, but the vineyard yielded wild grapes—not at all what the beloved intended. And now, God tells the people of Judah, the vineyard will be destroyed. The hedge is removed, the wall torn down, for God planted the people of Israel and Judah, the city of Jerusalem to be a people of justice, but instead, God experienced bloodshed, and heard the cry of the oppressed. What God intended for the people has been lost in their exploitation and violence, and so God will allow it to be destroyed instead of allowing it to continue harm.

Psalm 80:7-15 is a response to the image of the vineyard, calling upon God to restore the people. The psalmist acknowledges that it was God who brought the people out of their oppression in Egypt. God planted the people, the vine, in a safe, flourishing place, and now the vineyard is destroyed. The psalmist pleads with God, for now the wild animals have attacked and fed on the vineyard that God planted, and the psalmist desires for God to take care of the vine, the people, once again, so that the vine may survive.

Paul continues to encourage the church in Philippi in Philippians 3:4b-14. Paul knows they have been visited by missionaries who have presented a different gospel, one in which the people must keep the traditions they were given in order to be saved, but Paul argues that of all people, he could argue their position better. He was circumcised by tradition on the eighth day, born of the tribe of Benjamin, and a Pharisee—his list goes on. He has all claims on tradition, but none of them matter. Paul instead wishes to know Christ and the power of his resurrection by becoming like him in his death. Paul leaves all worldly matters behind of who he was and where he came from to claim Christ, for his righteousness came not from the law but from faith.

Jesus tells a parable of a vineyard in Matthew 21:33-46. In contrast to Isaiah’s parable, the vineyard was leased to tenants, who did not respect the servants of the owner. They seized them, beat them, even killed some of them instead of handing over the produce. At last, the owner sent his son, for he thought the tenants would respect his son. But instead, they kill him, hoping to gain his inheritance. When Jesus asks what the owner will do, the religious leaders respond that the owner will put the tenants to a “miserable death” and give over the vineyard to be cared for by others. Jesus responds by quoting Psalm 118, that the stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, alluding to how the religious leaders have rejected him. Jesus continues by boldly stating that the kingdom will be taken from them and given to those who produce the fruits of the kingdom. The religious leaders knew Jesus was talking about them, and they wanted to arrest Jesus.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Promise of Passover in Exodus 12:1-13, 13:1-18. God instructed the people through Moses on preparing the Passover lamb. This was a preparation for the people about to leave their oppression behind, a meal to remind them of how they fled with unleavened bread. The blood of the lamb was splashed on the doorposts, so that the angel of the Lord would pass by, to be a sign for them that God would lead them into freedom. Moses instructed the people to eat unleavened bread as a festival of remembrance long after they had left Egypt, as a way to instruct their children and remind them of what God had done for them. While the firstborn of Egypt were struck down, God consecrated the firstborn of Israel as a reminder that all people, all things belong to God.

In Luke 22:14-20, Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples, but called his disciples to remember him. In Luke’s account, there are two cups of wine shared, which would have been consistent with the Passover traditions. With the first cup, Jesus shared with the disciples that he will never again drink of it until the reign of God comes. Then he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them so they would remember him. When he took the second cup, he declared that it was poured out as the new covenant in his blood. Because Jesus’ words are so different from the Passover, this is a new meal, a new tradition for Christians instead of a “Christian Passover.” We must be clear when we celebrate Communion that Jesus is not trying to re-interpret the Passover meal of the Jewish people for us, but created a new ordinance for us to remember him by.

In the Revised Common Lectionary, we have been following the parables of Jesus for the last few weeks. All these parables are about the kingdom of God, and how the kingdom of God turns the realm of this world upside down. However, this week’s parable points more directly to God’s intentions. God intended life, not death. God intended partnership with us as co-creators and caretakers of the world, and we have corrupted, harmed, and even destroyed God’s creation and distorted God’s purpose for our own gain. When the religious leaders respond to Jesus that the landowner will punish the wicked tenants, that is their response, not Jesus’. Instead, Jesus is the one who knows that he will take the punishment given by humanity. When God gave Moses the commandments to give to the people, the intention was for the people to remember who God was, that God was the one who brought them out of their oppression, and that they were a people consecrated for God. Humanity has used both the words of Jesus and the commandments to bully, shame, and exploit others, instead of returning to God’s intentions for us: to live as God’s people, to care for creation and one another, and to live into God’s reign on earth as it is in heaven.

On this World Communion Sunday, as we remember how Christ took bread and wine and gave it to his disciples to remember him, to know the new covenant, we remember God’s intentions for us, and we renew ourselves to Christ’s call to God’s intention: to love our neighbor as ourselves, to live into the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Call to Worship

**We are created in the image of God.
We are commanded to love God and one another.**

**We are required to do justice, love mercy,**

**and walk humbly with God.**

**We are called to follow Jesus.**

**In this time of worship,**

**may we remember God’s intention for us,**

**Christ’s call upon us,**

**And the Spirit’s movement in us.**

**Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we have distorted Your image in us. We have disrupted Your intention for us. We have taken advantage of the vulnerable and marginalized instead of caring for these as You have called us to do. We have failed to live into Your commandments. We have not listened to Your call on our lives. Forgive us. Call us into the difficult work of reparation and restoration. Guide us into the ways of healing justice and mercy. Wisdom on High, breathe in us Your truth, and may we understand Your intentions for us. May we live into Your intention of love and life for all. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The Creator knows you, for God made you. The Creator knows your heart, your mind, your body, your soul. The Creator knows that you are more than what others suspect. You are more than what others interpret. You are more than what can be perceived. You are made in the image of God, and you are beloved. You are created with the intention to love and care for others and the world. Live into your intention. Seek forgiveness, and know you are forgiven. Seek to repair what is broken, and know that God is at work repairing your heart and soul. Seek to love one another, and know that you are God’s beloved, and with you, God is well pleased.

Prayer for World Communion Sunday

Loving Christ, You gathered Your disciples together long ago on the night you were betrayed, and called upon them to remember You. You called upon them to remember Your love, Your grace, and Your forgiveness. You called each of them, including the one who betrayed you, the one who denied you, the one who doubted you, and the ones who argued over who was the greatest. You called them, and you call us. On this day, we remember that none of us are worthy, that all of us fall short, and yet, You still call us friends, and You invite us to remember that You laid down your life for us, and You have called us into a new covenant. We gather with our siblings around the world, from all backgrounds and traditions, to share in this simple meal together, in which Your presence is made known to us in a new way.

We confess our sins to You, O Christ, that we have not been one as You intended. We confess that instead of celebrating and embracing our differences of cultures and histories, the church has embraced Western culture as the culture of the church. The church has colonized, oppressed, and at times worked to destroy what You, O God, created to be beautiful. We confess and seek forgiveness. O God, for those of us who have participated in oppression, call us into accountability and the work of reparation.

May we come before You with clean hearts, O God, ready to receive Your body and blood, Your life laid down for us, so that we might know Your love and life everlasting. May we receive the love and grace of our siblings worldwide as we celebrate at Your table, and know that in You, we are participants in the New Covenant, in the eternal life promised, through You, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.