Worship Resources for November 1st, 2020—Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints Day

Revised Common Lectionary Readings:

Twenty-Second Sunday: Joshua 3:7-17 and Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37; Micah 3:5-12 and Psalm 43; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:1-12

All Saints Day: Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

Narrative Lectionary: God’s Care for the Widow, 1 Kings 17:1-16 (17-24), (Luke 4:24-26)

Beginning with the readings for the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, we begin with Joshua 3:7-17. Harkening back to the story of Moses and the people leaving Egypt for the wilderness and crossing through the Red Sea, a generation later the people, led by Joshua, crossed the River Jordan into the land promised them. God told Joshua to tell the priests who carried the ark to stand in the middle of the river, and as they did, the waters held off in a heap while the Israelites passed through on dry ground.

The psalmist gives thanks and praise to God for God’s faithfulness in Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37. Though the people wandered in the wilderness, God delivered them from their distress and led them to safety. Though God can dry up the rivers and springs, God can also provide water for the thirsty and food for the hungry. God may lead the people to an inhabited town from the wilderness, but God also provides a home right where the people are, for wherever God is, they are at home.

The prophet Micah cries out against false prophets in Micah 3:5-12. The false prophets only give good news when things are going well for them. They call the people to battle when they are going without. The prophet Micah is not afraid to call out for justice and truth. The leaders have turned astray from God’s ways for their own gain. The prophets and priests are in it for money and the rulers are easily bribed. Micah prophesies judgment—that if the political rulers and religious leaders turn their backs on God, they will find only chaos and destruction. Micah prophesies the demise of Jerusalem.

The psalmist cries out to God for vindication in Psalm 43. The people are unjust, but the psalmist remains faithful. They call upon God to lead them in the ways of truth, to lead them to the altar where they may worship, and they will praise God, for they know their hope is in God.

Paul reminds the church in Thessalonica of how he acted with them when he first met them in 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13. Paul was like a father to them, and the church was a witness to his actions, that everything he did, he did because of, and for, God. Paul did not act out of his own gain, but to encourage them to lead a life worthy of God. Paul gives thanks that when they heard his word, they did not accept it as a human word, but as the word from God.

Jesus taught the disciples in Matthew 23:1-12 to do as the religious leaders said, but not as they lived. For their teaching was sound, it was how Jesus perceived the religious leaders of his day to be living their lives that was problematic. They judged others and loved having the spotlight and glory. They were not humble. They loved being called rabbi. But then Jesus turned it onto the disciples, instead of calling out the religious leaders around him. The disciples should not be calling each other rabbi, for they have only one rabbi. They should call no one else father, for they have one Father in heaven. They have only one instructor, Jesus. What started off seeming like an insult to the religious leaders was a caution for all of them—that all who live into God’s ways can start to see themselves as better than others and allow greed and pride to take over. Instead, to follow God, the greatest must become the servant, and the exalted must become humble.

The Revised Common Lectionary Readings for All Saints Day begin with John of Patmos’ vision of heaven in Revelation 7:9-17. John saw a multitude from every nation that no one could count, of all tribes and languages, praising and glorifying God. All the angels worshiped God. One of the elders speaks to John, telling him that these are the ones who have come through the great ordeal, they have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb to be pure, and now worship God day and night. God is their shelter, and they will hunger and thirst no more, and God will wipe away all their tears.

Psalm 34:1-10, 22 begins as a call to the people to worship. The psalmist testifies how God has delivered them, and how God delivers those who are close to God from evil. God answered the psalmist’s prayers, and the psalmist calls upon the people to turn to God without shame. The psalmist invites the reader/listener to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” To use all our senses and know that God is with us. Those who know God have nothing to fear, and those who turn to God will have no condemnation.

1 John 3:1-3 writes that all who are God’s beloved are children of God and become like God. The world did not know God, so the world does not know the faithful. Those who know God still do not know the fullness of God or who they will become, but right now, we are all children of God. Those who have this hope will purify themselves to be ready before God, for God is pure.

Jesus shared the Beatitudes, or Blessings, in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:1-12. Jesus taught that those who mourn, those who are poor in spirit, those who are children, those who are peacemakers, those who are persecuted—all the people on the margins, forgotten, or looked down upon will be blessed, will inherit, will proclaim the reign of God, now and always. Jesus called upon them to rejoice, for their reward would be great in heaven.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to God’s care for the widow, for those on the margins in 1 Kings 17:1-24. There was a drought in the land, and the prophet Elijah told King Ahab it would not be lifted until God said so. It was a sign against Ahab’s corrupt leadership as king, turning away from God. God provided for Elijah by telling him which streams were still flowing that he could drink from, and God even sent the ravens to bring him bread and meat, until the water dried up. Though the drought was a sign from God, a widow in Zarephath was suffering in the same drought. God told Elijah to go to her and that she would take care of him, but she had nothing left and was about to run out of meal and oil. Elijah reminded her that God would provide for her, and that her oil and meal would not run out, for she was certain she and her son would starve. However, even though they didn’t run out, her son still became sick and died. The woman wondered why Elijah came if her son was to die anyway. Elijah stretched himself over the body of the boy three times, praying that God would take away the evil that had befallen the widow, and the boy lived. The woman believed that Elijah was sent by God, and that he spoke the words of God.

In Luke 4:24-26, after Jesus had read the scroll of Isaiah in his hometown synagogue and everyone spoke well of him, he changed his tune. Jesus reminded the people that the good news fulfilled in their hearing may not be good news to them, and reminded them that Elijah was sent to the widow in Zarephath, not any of the widows of Israel. He was sent to the foreigner, even though the drought was severe in Israel.

On this All Saints Day, we pause and remember our loved ones who have gone before us. We remember those who faithfully lived in God’s ways. We look to them, to our ancestors, for guidance. We are reminded of the faithfulness of our ancestors, who crossed the Red Sea and the Jordan, when water was a barrier between oppression and liberation, between the past and the future with hope. We also remember the prophets, who spoke and prayed during times of drought and hardship where there was no water, and God provided the wellsprings to rise up. We remember how the prophets spoke against those who took advantage of others for political gain and wealth—a warning that we had well heed today. We remember that God is with us in all seasons, during times of flood and drought, during times of life and death, during times of hopelessness and times of blessing. God calls us blessed when we are downtrodden and poor in spirit, when we are meek, when we are feeling rejected and persecuted and have given up. God does not give up on us, but is in the journey with us, and will see us through.

Call to Worship (from Matthew 5:3-9)

**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.**

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

 **Blessed are you, children of God, for yours is the reign of God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Ancient of Days, we have failed to learn the lessons of our ancestors. We have failed to follow their footsteps in faith. Instead of gaining wisdom, we often repeat their folly. We tune out the teachings of old, thinking we know better, but fall into the same traps of worldly fame and success. Call out to us, O God, through the prophets of old who spoke truth to power. Call out to us, O God, through the wisdom of the sages that continues to tug at our hearts. Call out to us, O God, in the needs of our neighbors, reminding us that when we love one another, we love You best. In the name of Christ, who came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, who came to show us how to live into Your ways, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Wisdom continues to call to us, to lead us back to God. Listen to the voice of wisdom from our ancestors in the faith. Understand the ways of the saints who lived their lives as examples for us. Follow Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and know that you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Continue to seek God’s ways. Incline your heart to wisdom and justice, and live into God’s righteousness and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Holy One, there is a time for every season, and every purpose under heaven. You brought forth humanity from the earth, and You return us to the earth. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and our days on this earth are short, though You are eternal. May we make each moment count. May we spend our time wisely with those we love, and honor their memories when they are gone. On this All Saints Day, we give thanks for the saints in our lives, the ones we have known, and the ones who have inspired us. May we live our lives into the best of their ways. May we continue to learn from them. May we continue to shape the world into Your reign, on earth as it is in heaven, to leave it a little better than we found it. Amen and Amen.