Worship Resources for November 22nd, 2020—Reign of Christ Sunday, Thanksgiving Sunday (U.S.)

Revised Common Lectionary

Reign of Christ Sunday: Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24; Psalm 100 or Psalm 95:1-7a; Ephesians 1:15-23; Matthew 25:31-46

Thanksgiving Sunday: Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 17:11-19

Narrative Lectionary: God Promises a New Covenant, Jeremiah 36:1-8, 21-23, 27-28 then 31:31-34 (Luke 22:19-20)

We have come to the end of our season after Pentecost, the last Sunday in the liturgical calendar before beginning again in year B the start of Advent.

The prophet Ezekiel had witnessed the kings and rulers of Judah forget God’s ways. The priests and other leaders worshiped other gods, allowed practices that were against God’s ways and forgot the poor, the widow, and the orphans among them. The kings and others made poor political choices, and then Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and took almost everyone into exile. Their leaders were like bad shepherds who led the people into danger. But now, God would be their shepherd. God would lead the people out of exile, gather them and lead them to good grazing pastures and cool waters. God as their shepherd would help them to lie down in safety (reminiscent of Psalm 23) and would judge between the sheep—the ones who had overused resources and looked to their own interests, and those who went without. God would set up a new shepherd—one like David—who would care for all the sheep.

Psalm 100 is a call to worship God. God is the one who made us, and we are called to come with gladness and singing, to enter the gates of the temple with thanksgiving and praise. God is our shepherd, and we are the sheep of God’s pasture. God’s steadfast love endures forever, and God’s faithfulness to all generations.

Psalm 95:1-7a is also a call to worship and song of praise. God is the true king above all kings. God made all of creation, the dry land and the sea, the mountains and the valley depths. The psalmist calls the people to worship and bow down. The people are the sheep of God’s hand, and they belong to God.

Ephesians may have started out as a letter from Paul that was then sent on to other churches, as so many specifics are left out and it is more of a general letter to the church. In this introduction, the writer heard of their faith, and gave thanks for them in their prayers. The writer prayed for the readers and listeners to have a spirit of wisdom and revelation, to be open to what was shared with them, so they may come to know Christ. For those who believe, the power of God was at work in Christ, raised from the dead, and Christ now has all power, authority, and dominion, for Christ is the head of the church. The church is Christ’s body, and the church is the fullness of Christ on earth.

The final parable (or allegorical tale—it’s up for debate among scholars whether this is a true parable) in Matthew’s account is found in 25:31-46. Jesus shared an allegorical story with the disciples and all who were listening. Before, it was not always clear if the master, landowner, or king was to be equated with God. For most of Matthew’s parables, the question was not who is God in the parable, but who are you—how do you respond and act in the reign of God? But now, in this story, the Son of Humanity was seated on the throne, and all the nations were gathered, separated like a sheep was separated from goats. And Jesus declared that those who cared for the least among them—feeding and clothing and giving water to those in need, caring for the sick and the imprisoned—when they did this to the least among them, they did it to him. They may not have recognized that was what they were doing, but they are the ones who would inherit the kingdom prepared before the world began. In other words, this was God’s intention for humanity, going back to Genesis 1: to care for the earth, to care for those in need among us, to love our neighbors as ourselves. But for those who didn’t live into God’s intention, who didn’t feed and care for those in need, who didn’t care for the sick or visit the imprisoned—they received the suffering fire prepared for the devil and his angels. This was not from the time the world began, but rather, perhaps the consequences of their actions: they didn’t care for anyone who was in need and suffering, so when they suffered, there would be no one to care for them. This was the very last teaching before Christ shared the Passover meal with his disciples, right before his own betrayal, arrest, and death. As Moses taught the people to choose life, setting before them life and death in Deuteronomy 30:15-20 before his own death, Jesus gave the disciples and all his followers a choice of which way to choose.

The readings for Thanksgiving begin with Deuteronomy 8:7-18. Moses prepared the people who were about to enter the land God promised them for what lay ahead. Moses reminded the people not to forget their God who led them from out of the wilderness, that it was God who provided for the people. The people should never think they worked hard and earned everything all on their own—everything they had came from God, and they ought to give thanks to God, the one who made the covenant with their ancestors long ago.

The psalmist sings praise to God in Psalm 65, the one who dwells in their temple, the one who forgives sins, answers prayer, and delivers the people. God cares for the earth, providing water and tilling the soil. God crowns the year with the bounty of harvest, decorating the fields with grain. The meadows and fields sing to joy to God, as does all of creation, in thanksgiving for all God has done.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Paul was making an argument for the wealthier people in Corinth to give to those in need. Part of Paul’s ministry was asking the churches in the wealthier cities to give to the poor in Jerusalem who were suffering. Paul wrote that those who gave generously would receive generously, for they would be enriched in this act of gratitude. Through their act of giving, they glorified God in their generosity.

In Luke 17:11-19, Jesus encountered a group of ten lepers at the edge of a village. They kept their distance from him, but called out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” Jesus told them to go, show themselves to the priests, and they would be made clean. But one of them, when he realized that was healed, came back, fell at Jesus’ feet, and thanked him. That man was a Samaritan. The others had gone on, but this Samaritan came back to show his gratitude. Jesus made a point of showing the disciples that only the foreigner returned to give thanks, the outsiders, the one they didn’t expect. Jesus then told the Samaritan that his faith made him well.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the new covenant in Jeremiah. Beginning first with chapter 36, we read of what God said to Jeremiah. God told Jeremiah to write down everything God had told him from the time of King Josiah until that moment. Jeremiah dictated everything to Baruch, a scribe, who wrote them down on a scroll, because Jeremiah has been restricted from the temple. Baruch instead takes the scroll to the temple and reads out loud God’s words to the people. Baruch then took the scroll to the king’s officials, and the king’s officials were alarmed, and told Baruch to take Jeremiah and to go and hide. The king’s servant Jehudi read the scroll to the king, but the king cut up the scroll and burned it. But God told Jeremiah to get another scroll and to again write down everything that was in the first scroll.

In Jeremiah 31:31-34, God declared to Jeremiah soon God would make a new covenant with the people. It would not be like the former covenant which they broke, even though God had partnered with the people as God led them out of Egypt. But this new covenant would be engraved on their hearts, that they would be God’s people. They would all know God, who forgave their sins and remembered them no more.

In Luke 22:19-10, Jesus spoke of a new covenant as he shared the bread and the cup at the Passover meal. As Jesus broke the bread and gave it to the disciples, he told them that this was his body given for them. In the same way, he took the cup after the meal and told them that the cup was the new covenant in his blood, poured out for them.

God’s love endures forever. On this Reign of Christ Sunday, we remember God’s intention for us was to love one another as God loved us. We were made in the image of God, to care for the world that God had made, and to love one another. We have fallen short, we have sought our own interests and gain. However, God has never given up on us, and God continues to lead us on. Through Christ, we know that the kin-dom is at hand, and we still can turn back to God and live into God’s intentions for us. In thanksgiving, may we remember that we were intended for good works. We were intended to love and to be loved. We were intended for more than what we often see. We were intended to live into Christ’s reign on earth, as it is in heaven, for we have the power and ability to end suffering for others now, when we love and care for one another’s needs.

Call to Worship (Psalm 100)

**Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.**

**Worship the LORD with gladness; come into God’s presence with singing.**

**Know that the LORD is God. It is God that made us, and we are God’s;**

**We are God’s people, and the sheep of God’s pasture.
Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving, and God’s courts with praise.**

**Give thanks to God, bless God’s name.
For the LORD is good; God’s steadfast love endures forever,**

**And God’s faithfulness to all generations.**

(alternative) Call to Worship (Psalm 95:1-3, 6)

**O come, let us sing to the LORD;**

**Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into God’s presence with thanksgiving;**

**Let us make a joyful noise to God with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God,**

**And Sovereign above all gods.**

**O come, let us worship and bow down,**

**Let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Everlasting to Everlasting, we confess that we are short-sighted. We make quick decisions to help ourselves now and do not foresee the long-term consequences of our actions. We make choices that benefit us and fail to notice how our choices may harm others. Call us into repentance, into turning back. Broaden our view, so we may understand how our actions may cause more harm than good. Guide us into ways of sustainable living, caring for those in need around us, and remembering Your intention and commandment for our lives: to love our neighbors as ourselves. For You first loved us, called us into being, and set us on this earth with intention: to have dominion as You have dominion over us, to care for this beautiful planet You gave us as our home. May we work to do our part to help Your reign be established on earth as it is in heaven. In Your precious name we pray, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

This is the new covenant that God declares is written in our hearts: God loves us. God’s wisdom is planted in our hearts. No longer do we have to say, “Know the Lord,” because if we know love, we know God. God will forgive our wrongdoing, and remember our sin no more. God’s love is in your heart. Embrace it. Know that You are God’s beloved child. Go and share the good news of God’s love, grace, and forgiveness. Amen.

Prayer

King of Kings, Sovereign Above All, though we have moved on in this world from such archaic language, we remember our ancestors who struggled to survive among wars and exiles, and saw You as the king who would never fail them, the one who ruled above all. Though we call You by many names, may we remember how our ancestors turned to You when all else was failing, and may we turn to You in the same way. For You are our source of light and love, and in whom we live and move and have our being. There is no other God. There is no other way for us than Your way, which is love. Through Your love, may we learn how to love one another. Through Your forgiveness, may we learn how to forgive. Through Your ways of peace, may we seek justice, practice loving-kindness, and move forward, in humility with You. We pray everything in Your name. Amen.