Worship Resources for October 1, 2017—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 17:1-7 and Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32 and Psalm 25:1-9; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32

Narrative Lectionary: God’s Name is Revealed, Exodus 2:23-25; 3:1-15; 4:10-17 (John 8:58)

The people, newly out of slavery in Egypt, complain to Moses in the wilderness that there is no water to drink. So Moses in turn cries out to God, and God tells Moses to take some of the elders with him and to strike the rock at Horeb with the same staff he struck the Nile with, and named the place Quarreling, because the people quarreled and tested God, wondering if God was with them or not.

The psalmist calls out, “Gather round, children, and let me tell you the secrets of old,” in Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16. The psalmist declares what God has done—having the people walk on dry land, leading the people by day in the form of a cloud, by night as a fiery pillar, and by bringing water out of rocks. God is a God of mystery and wonders and miracles, and we must continue to tell them to future generations so we do not forget what God has done.

God speaks to the prophet Ezekiel and tells him not to use an old proverb that was often said in Israel about parents eating sour grapes and setting their children’s teeth on edge. No more can the people use that excuse. All lives are accountable to God, all accountable for their actions, and God has already shown them the way to live. God offers forgiveness for those who repent of their ways, because God does not desire death. God does not want punishment. God wants restoration and healing. But if the people refuse to accept it, they will meet their end.

The psalmist asks God for guidance in following God’s path in Psalm 25:1-9. The psalmist asks God to not hold on to the past sins, but instead provide guidance and instruction. God is the one who teaches us humility, what is right, and leads us in right paths.

Paul urges the church in Philippi to be of the same mind in Philippians 2:1-13. The church was beloved to Paul but had experienced some inner conflict among leaders, and Paul reminds them that Christ himself didn’t come to lord it over them, but became humble, obedient to the point of death on the cross. Christ laid down his life, and so we ought to also work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, because none of us can be equal with Christ, but Christ has shown us the way through humility.

Jesus is questioned about his authority in Matthew 21:23-32. Jesus turns the question back on the religious leaders: by whose authority did John baptize? At this point, John the Baptist was dead, but revered by the crowds. The religious leaders were trapped. If they said it was his own authority, the crowds would be upset, but if they said it was by God, they would be upset that they did nothing to stop his death. They cop out, saying, “I dunno.” Jesus declares he won’t tell them, either, but follows up with a parable in which one son promises to do something but doesn’t, and another says he won’t do it but later changes his mind and does. Jesus tells this parable because the religious leaders are still judging him and John the Baptist, despite the good works that both Jesus and John did, and yet the sinners—the ones they despise—are following Jesus and living into God’s ways.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on God’s Name Revealed to the Hebrew People through Moses in Exodus. A new pharaoh enslaved the Israelites, a pharaoh who did not know them, but God took notice of them. God speaks to Moses through a blazing bush, though the fire did not consume the bush. God tells Moses that God has observed the misery of the people; God has heard them cry and knows their suffering. God tells Moses that he is to be sent to Pharaoh, to bring the Israelites out of oppression. But Moses is uncertain. “Who do I say you are? Who is the God of our ancestors?” And God replies, “I AM sent you.” The name for God here implies a verb rather than a noun, that God is a God of action. But Moses is still uncertain and nervous and wants God to find someone else because he can’t speak in front of people. God gets angry with Moses, but provides him with what he needs—his brother Aaron to speak on his behalf.

Jesus speaks in John 8:58 of eternity by saying, “Before Abraham was, I am.” Before they had ancestors, even their great ancestor, Jesus was with God. But many of the leaders wanted to throw stones at him after he said this, as by doing so, he not only possibly identifies himself with God but claims to be prior to Abraham, which usurps their understanding.

We don’t want to take responsibility for the things we have done. True, there is systemic sin that oppresses and harms us, as in the day of Moses, as in today with mass incarceration of black people and the uptick in white supremacy being flaunted about. But God still holds us accountable for who we are. We belong to God, we ought to act like we belong to God. We need to help those in need around us. We need to do our part to lend a hand to a neighbor in need, to not neglect those around us who are suffering. For those with privilege, it is our responsibility to do our part to dismantle poverty. For those who are white, it is our responsibility to dismantle white supremacy and racism. Even if we claim to not be racist, or claim that how we live doesn’t affect other’s lives, we are lying to ourselves and participating in systemic sin. We must be responsible for what we do—and what we do not do, when we remain silent and inactive.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 25:4-9)

Make known to us Your ways, O God;

**Teach us Your paths.**

Lead us in truth, and teach us,

**For You are the God of our salvation.**

Do not remember the sins of our youth,

**But in Your goodness and steadfast love, remind us and teach us.**

God is good, upright, and true;

**Come, worship God, who leads us into life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we have not been humble. We have been certain of our own truth, that our own point of view is the only point of view, or at least the correct one. We have dismissed others and turned up our noses. Forgive us, O God, for putting ourselves above others, because in the end, we all came from You, and we all return to You. Forgive us, O God, for thinking we are better than others. Forgive us, O God, for not seeing our places of privilege and advantage. Give us humble hearts to serve others, O God, and to see one another as siblings, all children of You. In the name of Christ, our Brother, Redeemer, and Savior, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God is the one who is at work in us, stripping away the chaff, tearing out the sin that harms us, and renewing us in the Spirit for good works. Go, knowing that your sins are not a stain, that you are forgiven and loved by God. Amen.

Prayer

God, You take notice of us. You hear our cries. You know our wounds. You know each of us by name. You are more aware of us than we can possibly imagine or understanding. Help us to be aware of others around us: of their needs, of their grief, of their troubles. Help us to take notice of the suffering around us and to listen to the cries of others. As You call us to serve our neighbors and to love, may we be filled with Your love and compassion, taking notice of all, especially the lost and the least. Amen.

A Litany for World Communion Sunday

Let there be no divisions among us,

**For Christ is one body, and we are the body of Christ.**

May we come together to share in this holy meal,

**For Christ is one body, and we are the body of Christ.**

Around the world, of all languages and peoples, we eat together;

**For Christ is one body, and we are the body of Christ.**

Of all denominations and creeds, we follow one Savior who died for all;

**For Christ is one body, and we are the body of Christ.**

On this day we remember that the dividing wall has been torn down,

**For Christ is one body, and we are the body of Christ.**

This bread, may it nourish us. This cup, may it fill us;

**For Christ is one body, and we are the body of Christ.**

This meal, may it be for remembrance, and may we remember we are called to be one.

**For Christ is one body, and we are the body of Christ.**