Worship Resources for October 11, 2015—Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Job 23:1-9, 16-17 or Amos 5:6-7, 10-15; Psalm 22:1-15 or Psalm 90: 12-17; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31

Narrative Lectionary: Hear O Israel, Deuteronomy 5:1-21, 6:4-9 (Mark 12:28-31)

This is the second week of four selections from the book of Job in the Wisdom Literature thread of the Hebrew Scripture choices for the lectionary this season, and it contains Job’s complaint. Job, who did not curse God when all was taken from him, even his health, still wants to know why this happened. If he could only find God, he would plead his case, that he is innocent. Illness and misfortune in biblical times (in both testaments) was often seen as a result of sin. But Job is innocent. Job knows that God is everywhere, and yet, all he can feel and see is the absence of God in this moment.

The prophet Amos preaches against the rulers, and all those with wealth and power, who have oppressed the poor and ignored their needs. During Amos’ time, the wealthy elite were gaining power by extorting from the poor, and they were turning away from worship of God to the worship of the gods of neighboring lands. Their religious unfaithfulness was tied into their unfaithfulness to those in need around them. Amos relates God’s anger to them, and calls upon the people to turn their hearts back to God and God’s ways, to seek goodness and establish justice, and depart from evil.

Psalm 22:1-15 is a psalm of lament (the first line was quoted by Jesus upon the cross). The psalmist cries out for God and raises up the complaint that God has abandoned them. The psalmist is humiliated by their enemies, and God has not answered—but they refuse to give up. The psalmist continues to call out, even in despair, and remembers that God is the one who helped the psalmist come to life, to be kept safe after birth, and the psalmist knows that God is there. The psalmist pleads for God to draw near, for they feel forsaken and alone.

Psalm 90:12-17 is the second half of a psalm pleading for God to turn back to the people, though the psalmist knows that most of the people are not faithful, and will fall away. The psalmist pleads for God to have compassion on the people and not abandon them, and to turn their remaining years into blessing and prosperity.

Hebrews 4:12-16 refers to Jesus as our High Priest. Our sins are not hidden, but our High Priest understands and sympathizes, having been fully human, yet without sin. Because Christ sympathizes and intercedes on our behalf, we can come to God with boldness, knowing God’s love and forgiveness. The Word of God continues to judge and hold us to accountability, but in Christ, we can know forgiveness and we can live before God without fear.

Mark 10:17-31 tells the story of a rich young man who came before Jesus and wanted to obtain eternal life. He must have known something was missing from his life, or suspected that he might not achieve it, before coming to Jesus with this question. Jesus looks at him and loves this man. This man is sincere—he wants to follow God’s ways and inherit eternal life. But he cannot give up the power his possessions have over him. He cannot give up the power wealth had over him. He could not sell his possessions as Jesus asked him to do and give the proceeds to the poor. Jesus tells the disciples that it will be hard for those with wealth to enter the kingdom of God—but also that for any of us, we must become last of all and servant of all if we truly wish to live in God’s kingdom.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Shema in Deuteronomy, the declaration that there is one God, that God is one, and we are called to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. We are also to teach these precepts to our children. This is God’s covenant with us, and our part in the covenant is that we love God. The Gospel lesson is Jesus’ recitation of the Shema when he is asked what is the greatest commandment—but he adds to it a second, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” This is the heart of our beliefs, the heart of God.

Where is God? Trusting and following God is difficult to do, but even more so when what God asks us to do is countercultural to what the world teaches. To become last of all and servant of all? To sell our possessions and give the proceeds to the poor? To care for the poor over our own desires? To seek justice instead of our own assurance? All of this is countercultural. To trust in God’s presence, even when we feel God’s absence—this is counter cultural. To love one God and follow one God in Jesus’ day was still countercultural—but to love one’s neighbor as one’s self—this is countercultural today.

Call to Worship

Hear, O People: God loves you, and God loves you madly;

 **We shall love the Lord our God with all our being.**

Hear, O People: God calls you to serve the poor;

 **We serve the Lord, who came to us humble, without a home.**

Hear, O People: God calls you to follow Jesus;

 **Worship our God, who came to serve us, so we may serve the world. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Jesus, we confess that we don’t want to help others. We want to help ourselves first. We are tired of working so hard. We have so much to do. We have so little time. We want someone else to do the work. But You continue to call us to the work of justice. You continue to remind us that You came so that we might have life. Your death and resurrection continue to remind us that we must put other’s needs above our desires. Call to us to rise, to roll up our sleeves, and to do the work You have given us to do. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

In Christ Jesus there is rest and assurance. We are renewed for the journey, so we have the strength, and the courage, to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Know that you are forgiven, loved, and restored, and in Christ there is perfect peace and rest. Rise, and do the work Christ has called you to do. Amen.

Prayer

Holy One, the world is a discouraging place. The cries of injustice almost drown out Your voice. The cries of pain almost smother the voice of hope found in You. The cries of oppression and marginalization, starvation and death, are almost too much to bear—so much so, that we have become numb. Ease the pain, the cries, the noise of the world, so that we can hear Your voice, and find hope and encouragement to act justly in this world and to do Your work, on earth as it is in heaven. In the name of Christ, whose voice calls to us above the noise and cries, a voice that calls us to new life, we pray. Amen.