Worship Resources for October 12, 2014—Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 32:1-4 or Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23 or Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

Narrative Lectionary: Joshua Renews the Covenant, Joshua 24:1-15 (Matthew 4:8-10)

The family that we have followed since Abraham and Sarah were called throughout this thread in the Lectionary have now given up on God. They have waited too long for Moses to come down from the mountain, and they have complained to Aaron and had him make a god for them out of gold. God is angry, and ready to do away with them and start all over again with Moses, just as he did with Noah—but Moses intervenes and reminds God that the people are God’s children. They are God’s people, and Moses reminds God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses also tells God how will anyone believe and trust in the Lord if all others see is the destruction of the people by their own God? And God decides not to do it. Though we call God unchanging, apparently God’s mind is not unchangeable, and we see this time and again through the scriptures: when God remembers that all people are God’s children, God’s love endures forever.

Our thread of Scripture that weaves through the prophets brings us to Isaiah 25, which the prophet sings about God’s protection of the poor and needy, that God is a shelter in the storm, and God will protect them from their enemies. More importantly, however, is that God will destroy death. God will remove mourning and crying. Instead of their enemies triumphing, God will triumph over the one great enemy they all face: death. God’s salvation is not just from their worldly enemies, but from death itself.

Psalm 23 is the familiar psalm of David, of knowing God is with us even in the valley of the shadow of death. Evil does not have power over us, because God is with us everywhere. God leads us out of darkness into light, and is the Good Shepherd who will guide us to safety and peace.

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23 recalls the sin of the past, when the Golden Calf was made, and the people abandoned God, but God had not abandoned them. The psalmist sings that the people had forgotten God was with them, had forgotten God’s acts throughout history, and the psalm is a reminder not to forget again.

Philippians 4:1-9 names the specific situation that Paul has been alluding to in the first three chapters: a conflict between Euodia and Syntyche, two women in the church in Philippi who were having some sort of feud. Paul doesn’t name what the conflict was, no “she said/she said,” but instead urges them to be of the same mind in Christ. Paul asks his “faithful companion” to help them work out their differences (scholars aren’t exactly sure if that is Epaphroditus mentioned earlier in the letter, or Timothy or someone else). Paul encourages them to focus on what is good and pleasing to God rather than on things that cause them to quarrel, and Paul encourages the whole community to put their mind on Christ.

Matthew 22:1-14 contains the parable of the wedding banquet, in which the invited guests found excuses not to attend, and others killed the messengers, so the king has the city burned and the murderers destroyed. Then the king invites everyone to attend on the streets who was not invited the first time—good or bad. But then one person gets into the wedding banquet without a wedding robe, and he is thrown out. Many are called, but few are chosen. This is a tough parable. The invited guests have chosen not to come, but those that responded in violence are met with violence—those who live by the sword, die by the sword. But all the rest who come afterwards—if you are welcomed in, you are required to put on a wedding robe, and one refuses to do so. One refuses to change, so they are thrown out. All are invited, but few choose to follow the way of God. Many of us claim to be Christians, but few of us follow the ways of God’s love and justice as modeled by Jesus.

The Narrative Lectionary recalls the covenant of God with the people renewed with Joshua at Shechem. In verse 15, Joshua asks the people to choose carefully who they serve, and pledges himself and his family to God. God has chosen to be our God, has chosen all of us to be God’s children, but it is up to us to choose God in the end, to choose God’s ways, and to live into the fullness of life that God hopes for us.

Matthew 4:8-10 is the final temptation of Jesus by the devil in Matthew’s account. The devil tempts Jesus to worship him in order to have the whole world, but Jesus knows that God is the only one he is to serve. The fullness of life with God includes following God’s ways.

We belong to God, we were created by God in God’s image, and God has prepared us for good works to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:10). But we often are tempted by the things of this world, the values of this world, to seek out our own satisfaction. We abandon God and God’s ways for temporary comfort, forgetting what God has done for us and our ancestors, and forgetting ultimately Jesus, his life, and his death and resurrection. Choosing God is not easy, it requires us to change our whole lives, but we know that in Christ we have true life, eternal life that begins now.

Call to Worship

Creator of Life, call us into this time of worship;

 **May we feel Your presence among us now.**

Redeemer of Life, call us away from the ways of the world;

 **May we know Your forgiveness, and may we forgive others.**

Sustainer of Life, give us strength and courage for the journey;

 **In this time of worship, may we be renewed, encouraged, and strengthened in our faith.**

 **Let us worship our God together. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come to You knowing that we have fallen short. We have failed to keep our commitments. We have been faithless to Your way of life. We have sought temporary safety and security for ourselves, rather than seeking the well-being of the marginalized and oppressed. Forgive us for the ways we have intentionally and unintentionally harmed others in seeking to serve our own desires, and call us back to Your way of life, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to be servant of all, as Jesus taught us. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Philippians 4:9)

Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. Know you are forgiven, renewed and restored in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Universe, of space and stars and sky and sea, we gather to worship You, to seek Your wisdom in our lives, and to follow Jesus, who lived and died for us and lives again. May we be open to transformation, so that through You, we can transform our world into a place of loving-kindness, restoring justice, and hopeful peace. May we be open to changing our ways when they harm others. May we be open to changing our mind when our patterns of thinking are challenged. May we see You in others, may we seek You in all we do. In the name of Christ, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray all things. Amen.