Worship Resources for October 13th—Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 or 2 King 5:1-3, 7-15c; Psalm 66:1-12 or Psalm 111; Luke 17:11-19; 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Our first reading in the Hebrew Scriptures contains part of the letter that Jeremiah wrote to the elders of the people in exile in Babylon. The letter is a letter of hope, that things will be ok, that they should go on with their lives. They are to have families, to seek the well-being of the people where they live. For there are plans for a future with hope, and there is the hope of return. Jeremiah knows that this hope for return will not come in their lifetime, but they are to live with that hope in their new home, to become people of hope rather than people of hope, or people of violent retribution, or people of fear. God has called them to become people of Living Hope.

The second reading in 2 Kings contains the story of the healing of Naaman. Naaman is an otherwise unknown figure, only coming up in this chapter of 2 Kings as the commander of the army of the king of Aram, and he becomes a convert to the God of Israel through his miraculous healing under the instruction of Elisha. Most of the prophetic passages in the Hebrew Scriptures are for the Hebrew listeners of Israel and Judah—and when the focus is outside of their people, it is usually contained in the passages of judgment. However, this time, the focus is not judgment, but healing for the commander of the occupying army. This passage may allude to the coming exile, and proclaims faith in God and hope for all, even hope for converting the oppressors.

Psalm 66:1-12 sings of the praises of God for what God has done for the people. The psalmist recalls the leading of the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea and through the River Jordan into the promised land. God has delivered the people throughout history into the home they have been promised, a place of safety and peace.

Psalm 111 also sings of praise for God and what God has done. This psalm sings of God’s faithfulness to the people through the mighty acts of God. The psalmist gives thanks to God for all that God has done, and reminds the listeners of God’s love, faithfulness and redemption.

Luke 17:11-19 is another healing story, this time of ten lepers. While all are healed, and all are told to go show themselves to the priests, only one returns to thank Jesus when he is healed—and he turns out to be a Samaritan. None of the others came back, but to the one who came back, Jesus said “Your faith has made you well.” The others perhaps were just looking to move on with their lives, to get back to normal—but this one knows that his life has been changed forever.

2 Timothy 2:8-15 reminds the reader to endure in faith, that Christ endures with us. The poem in vs. 11-13 remind us that Christ is with us in life and death and endures with us. The warning only is for when we deny him, but even when we fail, and our faith falters, Christ’s faithfulness endures forever. The writer gives a warning about “wrangling over words” (vs. 14) because often arguing over words fails to produce agreement or anything good. Rather than arguing, fighting the fight, going the journey alone—we are reminded that Christ is indeed on the journey with us, has gone before us, and remains faithful even when we fail.

Sometimes in the faith journey we feel like failures. We want to give up. We have done our part to share the Good News but none of our friends come to church, nothing we do seems to bring people in, and still others even question our motives for what we are doing (think Elisha and Naaman). However, when we are faithful to God, we will see God’s faithfulness in us. Sometimes we are like the lone Samaritan who recognizes what God has done. Sometimes we are like Naaman, pulling and fighting all the way. And sometimes we are like Jesus, wondering what happened to all the others, but knowing that one is enough. The seeds are planted. Live in faithfulness, and you will experience God’s faithfulness in you.

Call to Worship

We gather together to sing praise to our God

 **Even when our bodies are tired, we feel God renewing our strength**

We gather together to lift up our prayers to God

 **Even when we are sad and downtrodden, God is lifting up our hearts**

We gather together to celebrate our Living God

 **We know that God will turn our mourning into dancing, for the joy of Jesus is in our hearts.**

 **Let us worship our God together!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Savior, we come before You, acknowledging that we have not always been faithful. It’s not that we have had our doubts, but that we have failed to acknowledge Your presence in our lives. We have been proud of our own accomplishments, frustrated when things don’t go our way, and we’ve turned inwards instead of seeking Your guidance, Your wisdom, and Your endurance in our lives. Forgive us when we have turned away from You. Forgive us when we have shut ourselves off from the lives of others. Forgive us when we dwell on ourselves instead of living more fully into Your love and grace. In the name of Christ, who remains faithful even when we do not, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from 2 Timothy 2:11-13)

If we have died with Christ, we will also live with Christ. If we endure, we will also reign with Christ. And even when we are faithless, Christ remains faithful, for Christ cannot deny himself. We are renewed and restored because of Christ’s love for us, a love that endures forever. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, the journey of faith is not easy. Our world groans and cries with the weight of injustice and oppression. Faith seems foolish, even insulting to express to others who have suffered so much. But faith is what gives us hope. Strengthen our faith, O God, and give us the courage to express that faith in the midst of suffering and pain. Grant us wisdom to share our faith in ways that encourage and build up others rather than make ourselves feel good. Most of all, call us into ways of living out hope in our lives: to do justice, to practice kindness, and to walk humbly with You. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.