Worship Resources for October 14, 2012—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; Mark 10:17-31; Hebrews 4:12-16

We continue in Job’s story to where Job makes his complaint to God. His complaint resonates in the hearts of those who have suffered and struggled and have wondered why God has allowed this to happen. These questions are never easy to answer, and any easy answers should be viewed with suspicion. There are times when God does not feel near to us, but distant, even absent. How do we live with those times of shadow and darkness? How do we hold on to hope? How do we find God in places of such sadness and despair? We might find it in the comforting shoulder of a friend or the embrace of a family member, but sometimes even then it seems empty. Job’s wife and friends did not provide comfort or even a peaceful silence; they came with judgment and empty words. We need to be careful in the times of other’s needs that we also do not provide judgment and empty words. Sometimes, all we can do is simply be there; and during our times of struggle, sometimes all we can do is show up.

Amos 5:6-7, 10-15 contains the declarations of the prophet Amos, that to live into God’s ways, we must do justice. We cannot ignore the poor and we cannot be blind to the oppression around us. To live in God’s ways is a hard call for us in today’s society, where in Western civilization, many of us live in privilege, enjoying the products made by poor workers in other countries and the services provided by those making less than a livable wage. What does Amos have to say to us about God’s ways of justice and mercy? Where are we ignoring the poor and allowing oppression to continue?

Psalm 22 is a plea for help by the psalmist in a time of great trial and struggle. The psalmist wonders why God has abandoned them; yet the psalmist also knows that God has not completely vanished. The same God who brought us into the world surely can deliver us again, though God may be distant and hard to find. Jesus himself felt this very same abandonment, this same sense of loss and loneliness on the cross, calling out these verses. God knows what it feels like, for God knows this loss as well.

Psalm 90:12-17 sings an understanding that faith is a lifelong journey; we need to remember God’s presence daily, and to pray in hope during our times of struggle. The psalmist asks for God’s blessings each day, and that God’s work may be made known to all people, especially those who are faithful.

Mark 10:17-31 is the story of the rich man who wanted to follow Jesus, but did not want to change his life for Jesus. He was ready to follow the commandments, the letter of the law, but not change his ways of life. God calls us to let go of the possessiveness of possessions. God also calls us to consider how others live around us, and to remember that earthly, material things will fall away. This is a hard lesson for all of us, especially in today’s consumer society. For those of us in Western civilization, we usually cannot imagine having less than what we have now. We look for 3 bedroom 2 bath houses or larger. We say “we need the space.” We often end up filling that space with stuff, stuff that is not necessary for life but we have determined it is. We ought to look at our brothers and sisters in the world and examine what it is we really need to live, and see the others around us who live with much less.

Hebrews 4:12-16 reminds us that before God, we are naked, exposed. But we are also forgiven through Jesus Christ, who has lived our human lives and knows our sufferings and our failings. Because of Jesus, we can go to God boldly, knowing that we are loved and forgiven, and that we can be made whole in our brokenness. There is nothing we can hide from God, but there is nothing to be ashamed about before God.

The life of faith is a hard life. If we had never known God, when we go through difficult times we wouldn’t be asking the question of where God is. We might say “that’s life,” and know we have to live with it. But because we know God, when we say, “that’s life,” it is much harder to live into the struggle. Why would God allow bad things to happen to good people? The story of Job is the story of life. We don’t know why these things happen. Easy answers don’t cut it. But we do know that when we remain faithful to God, somehow, God will see us through.

Being faithful to God calls us to live into God’s ways of justice. We need to love our neighbor as ourselves—it is the commandment Jesus gives us—and we cannot love our neighbor without seeing to their needs. And it is hard for us to see to their needs when we are too busy caring for our stuff, worrying about our material wants, rather than seeing the needs of others. This is a difficult lesson for us, and I’m not sure I’ll ever fully be able to let go of all the things I have. But I know that faith is a lifelong journey, and I don’t have to accomplish it all now. Before God, all our sins are exposed, but before God, all things are possible, all forgiveness is given, and all things are made new.

Call to Worship:

The buzz of the world interrupts our lives and fills our ears

**Call us into Your way of life, O God**

The complaints of others settle in our mind and cloud our vision

**Lead us into Your vision of life, O God**

The cries of the poor, the oppressed and the outcast pierce our hearts

**Guide us in Your example of living for others, O God**

Fill our hearts, fill our eyes, fill our ears with Your love, O God

**Let us be Your hands and feet in the world, O God. Let us worship You together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Prayer of Confession:

Loving Creator, we come to You with our questions, our struggles, and our doubts. There are times when our burdens feel unbearable and the darkness seems so thick. God of Light, continue to shine for us in the darkness. Guide us to the light. Help us to seek the love and care of others and to share our joys and burdens together. Remind us that we do not walk this journey alone. In the name of Christ, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.

Blessing of Assurance:

We know God walks with us through the valley of the shadow, though sometimes it is difficult to feel God beside us. Rest assured, while the valley is dark, God will see us through. There is nothing God cannot take: our anger, our bitterness, our frustrations, and our doubts. God can take it all and still turn us into something new. Know that you are forgiven, loved, and not alone. Amen.

Prayer:

Sojourning God, we pray for Your companionship to be made known to us, in times of ease and times of struggle. Help us to hear the calls of the oppressed and the poor. Guide us to live in ways that do not put our wants above the needs of others. Call us to heed the challenge of the prophets, to step out in faith and put our neighbors needs as important as our own. In the name of Christ, who loves us even when we try to walk away, even when we think the sacrifice is too great, and gives us renewed hope, we pray. Amen.