Worship Resources for October 14th, 2018—Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Joshua Renews the Covenant, Joshua 24:1-15 (16-26) (Matthew 4:8-10)

We continue with Job in our first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures. Job has lost everything, and his friends, in their attempts to comfort him, also accuse him, that he must have done something wrong. Job knows that he has a case, and wishes he could declare it to God, to show that he did nothing to deserve what happened to him. But in that moment, Job cannot feel the presence of God, he only knows God’s absence, and it terrifies him. He wishes he could just vanish into the darkness, just fade away, rather than suffer like this and feel the absence of God.

The psalmist feels utterly abandoned by God in Psalm 22:1-15, but they have not given up hope. The psalmist reminds God that their ancestors trusted in God, and God delivered them. However, the psalmist has been scorned and ridiculed by those around them. Still, the psalmist knows they were created by God, and God is the one who brought them into this world. They cry out to God in their anguish, both spiritual and physical, and call upon God to be close to them.

The prophet Amos warns the people who have forgotten the poor and sought only their own gain. In Amos 5:6-7, 10-15, the prophet speaks to the people not to forget that God is a God of justice, and they need to seek God’s ways, or everything they have will be taken from them. Seek goodness, hate evil, and practice justice; and they may know God’s mercy if they turn from their ways.

Psalm 90:12-17 calls upon God to teach the people to be wise with their days, for the people to work for God’s way of justice. The psalmist also calls upon God to turn back and have compassion and mercy on those who serve God, for they have seen both good and evil in their days.

The Epistle selection continues the letter to the Hebrews. In 4:12-16, the writer refers to the word of God as a two-edged sword. Since we know the Word as Jesus, our thoughts and intentions are judged by Christ. In other words, we are called to be authentic, and to know that Jesus, the Son of God, has walked the same life we have. Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (vs. 15), and is both our high priest and sacrifice, who intercedes for us.

A man asks Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life in Mark 10:17-31. This is someone seriously concerned if they have done enough. Jesus asks him if he has kept the commandments, and the man responds that he has. Jesus looks at the man, and the scripture tells us that he loved him. There was something in this man that drew Jesus to him, but he tells the man that he lacks one thing, that he must go and sell all that he has, distribute the proceeds to the poor; then he can follow Jesus. But instead, the man goes away grieving, for he had many possessions. Jesus laments how hard it will be for those with wealth to enter the reign of God. Peter starts to speak about how they’ve left everything to follow Jesus, and Jesus says that those who have left everything behind will receive eternal life, but that many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Joshua’s Renewal of the Covenant in 24:1-26. The people have now entered the land promised to them, crossing the river Jordan, and having defeated the people of Jericho and other cities there. However, Joshua knows that the people still have idols and follow the gods around them, so Joshua tells them they must choose: to follow the God who brought them out of Egypt, through the wilderness and to this land, or the gods of the peoples around them. As for Joshua, he has made his choice, and the people declare that they choose God as well, and Joshua renews the covenant. He writes down their commitment in the book of law, and makes a shrine to God with a stone under the oak tree.

In Matthew 4:8-10, Jesus is tempted by the devil in the wilderness. The devil shows him all the kingdoms of the world, and promises them to Jesus if Jesus will but worship him. Jesus tells Satan to get away, and that the scripture says to worship God and serve only God.

God has made a covenant with us to be our God, and we are to be God’s people. Marriage is often the metaphor used in the Bible, and while that metaphor can be problematic, sometimes the vows ring true: for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health. When things get rough, we can get angry like Job, we can wonder where God is, but we can’t abandon God, just like God cannot abandon us, even though it feels like it at times. The covenant with God requires us to practice justice, as Amos and the other prophets remind us. Jesus reminds us that in order to be close to God, to inhering the kingdom or reign of God (using an inheritance metaphor, such as parents to children), we have to be willing to give up everything else that has a hold on us. For many, this is too difficult, too much to ask. It breaks Jesus’s heart when the rich man walks away. As Joshua asked the people when he renewed the covenant, so we must ask ourselves, whom do we serve? The ways of this world (wealth, fame, worldly measures of success), or do we serve God, who calls us to become last of all and servant of all?

Call to Worship (from Amos 5:14-15, 21, 24; Micah 6:8)

Seek good and not evil, so that you may live;

 **And our God, the Holy One, will live with us.**

Hate evil and love good, establish justice in your community,

 **God desires to be one with us, to be gracious to us.**

God does not want lavish festivals, but desires justice;

 **Let justice roll down like waters, righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.**

Come, worship God, in this time, and in every moment you breathe:

 **May we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we confess that we judge others. We condemn people before we know them. We make assumptions and do not test them. We judge based on prejudice, past experiences, and politics. Forgive us as this is not Your way. Forgive us, for You are the true Judge, who knows our intentions and our hearts. Forgive us, because we still carry the same sins in us that we point out in others. Forgive us, for we have refused to listen. And forgive us when we fail. Forgive us when we fail to protect those who are harmed from hate speech. Forgive us when we allow the strangers among us to be imprisoned and forgotten. Forgive us when we allow abuse to continue, in an effort to hear both sides and creating a false sense of peace. Forgive us, because we still haven’t figured out how to protect the innocent and vulnerable. Forgive us, because we are a mess. Forgive us, because we want to do the right thing, and we keep failing. Teach us, O God, Your ways of love, justice, and mercy. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Our God is a God of restoration. From Genesis to Revelation, God is restoring what was lost. God is healing what was broken. God is renewing what was forgotten. God is restoring your heart. God is restoring your faith. God is restoring you, reclaiming you from the ways of the world. Take heart; you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

God of Peace, bring peace in our hearts. Breathe peace into us, that we may know Your presence. Bring peace to our communities. Help us to build bridges instead of walls, to reach out to those different than us, to include them in our peacebuilding. Bring peace to our places of worship, that we know the freedom of Your love, grace, and mercy. Guide us to make peace with those we have wronged, to find peace with those who have wronged us. Bring peace to our world, that we would know You as our Creator. Keep us in Your ways of peace that were taught to us by Your Son and by our ancestors, and help us to be at peace with You. Amen.