Worship Resources for October 18th, 2015—Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Job 38:1-7, 34-41 or Isaiah 53:4-12; Psalm 91:9-16 or Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c; Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:35-45

Narrative Lectionary: Ruth 1:1-17 (Mark 3:33-35)

In our third out of four parts of readings from Job, God finally answers Job’s petition. And God reminds Job that God is the God of All Creation, creating the entire universe, and it’s time for Job to grow up and realize that life isn’t fair, the world does not revolve around him. Horrible things have happened to Job, but it is not because he did anything to deserve it, as his friends have suggested, nor is it because God has caused it. No explanation is given for why this happened to Job, as it is in our lives. However, when we ask the question of “Where was God when this happened?” God has an answer for Job: busy making the universe (Side note: [this article and video on Neil DeGrasse Tyson speaking on “Your Ego and the Cosmic Perspective”](https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/06/17/neil-degrasse-tyson-ego-cosmic-perspective/) is a good companion to Job).

From the prophets, our second selection of Hebrew Scriptures is one of the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah. Though Christians have found similarities with the suffering of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah was writing about the suffering of the people Israel, personified as a man. The people, away in the exile, were paying the price for the political dealings and the religious unfaithfulness of the leaders of their parents and great-grandparents. They needed to understand why they had been through what they had been through, and as hope of return was coming to fruition, the prophet explained that they were innocent, but suffered because of the wrongdoings of others. One can see the great similarities with Israel’s suffering and with the suffering of Jesus later on, but Isaiah was giving a message of hope to the people in his time, to help explain why they had been through what they had been through.

Psalm 91:9-16 sings of God’s protection and deliverance. This portion of the psalm, famously quoted by the Devil to Jesus while he is in the wilderness, tells of God’s faithfulness to those who remain faithful to God and call upon the name of God.

The portions of Psalm 104 sings praises to God of Creation, specifically in this passage, God who created the earth, the mountains and the oceans, and set everything as it is, appointing their place and foundations.

Hebrews 5:1-10 tells of the work of priests, and that Jesus has been appointed now our high priest, interceding for all of us. The writer refers to the priest Melchizedek, referred to only in two verses in the Hebrew Scriptures: Genesis 14:18 and Psalm 110:4. Melchizedek is the first priest of God Most High encountered in the Scriptures (and serves bread and wine), and then is referred to once in the Psalms. There is a myth that Melchizedek never died (because his death is not mentioned) and that his priestly line is forever—hence the references to Melchizedek in Hebrews. Nonetheless, the importance is that Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of this priestly line, the last and ultimate High Priest for all humanity.

Mark 10:35-45 contains the story of James and John asking to be seated at Jesus’s right and left hand in his glory. They are still thinking of Jesus as bringing a new kingdom on earth, similar to David’s reign. They do not see that Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world. They do not understand what they are asking. They are imagining a position of power and authority and respect and honor. The way Jesus reigns, however, is through humility and service, becoming last of all and servant of all. They do not know what they are asking, as Jesus asks them—they do not understand that they need to be willing to give their very lives to serve others rather than themselves. The other disciples get angry with James and John, but Jesus reminds them that if they want to be better, they have to become humble.

The Narrative Lectionary moves to the story of Ruth. Ruth famously refuses to stay behind in her homeland of Moab after her Hebrew husband dies. She clings to her mother-in-law Naomi, vowing to stay with her, live with her, worship the same God as her, and to die where she dies. Ruth’s love for Naomi is a sacrificial love, willing to give up herself to care for her mother-in-law, and this faithfulness finds fulfillment in her later marriage to Boaz and the birth of her child Obed.

The passage from Mark 3:33-35 is when Jesus questions the crowd as to who is true family is, after his family by blood tries to stop him from speaking to the crowd, worried about him. Jesus reminds his own family, as well as the crowd, that those who do the will of God are his mother and sister and brother.

Why does life happen the way it does? Why do bad things happen? Why do better things happen to other people? Why are some people lucky and others not? Of course, there are systems of oppression in place that keep entire groups of people from reaching the same levels of worldly success that our white patriarchal society has created as the ideal to achieve. And of course, there is horrific violence in our society, such as we saw at Umpqua Community College in Oregon. However, there are sometimes just bad things that happen. Why did the wheel fall off of the Duck boat right at that moment to turn into the tour bus carrying college students in Seattle a few weeks ago, killing five? Why was my child born with a significant challenge to typical development and learning? Why did a loved one lose their job right at the same time another one was diagnosed with a terminal illness? Why do these things happen?

We don’t know, and we don’t have a good answer. But we do know that God, who created the universe, is continuing to create. And we know that sometimes our family of origin fails us, but the family of God is ever present with us. As Psalm 27:13 states, “I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.” We remember that though awful things may be happening in the world and in our lives, like Job, we will see the goodness of our God in this lifetime.

Call to Worship

We are called to be one body in Christ;

**Though we are all different, we need each other.**

We are created to give honor, praise, and glory to God;

**Though we are all different, we worship the same God together.**

We are challenged to share the gifts of God with all;

**Though we are all different, we serve one another and bear each other’s burdens.**

We are one in Christ Jesus our Lord;

**Though we are all different, we are the body of Christ.**

**Come, worship God who made each of us, and love our Savior who loves us all. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we have sought recognition and honor, fame and wealth, the successes of the world, over loving our neighbors and serving those in need around us. We would rather win the lottery and live comfortably than find new ways of sharing what we already have with the hungry and homeless. We would rather live in safety and security than seek justice for the oppressed and marginalized. Forgive us for our selfishness, and turn us to the needs of those around us. May we remember that we are all part of Your body, we are all Your children. May we remember that Jesus calls us to serve others, and that instead of worldly recognition and riches, he went to the cross. May we seek forgiveness for our selfish ways, at the same time forgiving ourselves for not being perfect and not being able to do it all, and may we strive simply to do what we can, to participate in Your reign on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Lamentations 3:22-23)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God’s mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is God’s faithfulness. You are loved and forgiven, renewed and restored by God. Go and do the same for others: share mercy, forgiveness, and love. Amen.

Prayer

Love that knows no bounds, You created out of love. You know our tears and pain when we are suffering, when we struggle, when we feel hopeless. You set limits to the sea and the earth, but there is no limit to Your love and forgiveness, mercy and grace. Help us to be set free from the limits around us, the challenges that we face in our daily lives. Help us to be set free from the ways of this world. Help us to work for justice so that others will be set free. Call us to unbolt the gates and unlock the chains of oppression and marginalization. In the name of Christ, who set us free from sin and death forever, we pray. Amen.