Worship Resources for October 19th, 2014—Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 33:12-23 or Isaiah 45:1-7; Psalm 96:1-13 or Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

Narrative Lectionary: David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 12:1-9; Psalm 51:1-9 (Matthew 21:33-41)

I love this passage in our first thread of the Hebrew Scriptures. Moses asks to see God’s glory, but God instead shows Moses his backside. Yes, you heard it right. God will pass by and Moses will see his backside. All God’s goodness shall pass before them—they all shall see the goodness of God—but to actually see the face, the glory of God—no, God will only show them his backside. Perhaps, sometimes, we are asking God for the wrong thing. We want to see in order to believe, when all the goodness and mercy of God is right before us already.

In our second thread through the Prophets, the prophet Isaiah tells of Cyrus from Persia, who will end the reign of Babylon and the exile of the people. Cyrus will help the people to return home. The prophet describes all the great and wondrous things God will do—mountains that are in their way will be leveled. Doors and gates that are closed will be cut down and destroyed. All that has been taken from them—they will have even more. God promises them that they will return home, because God is God.

The psalmist sings in Psalm 96 of the great and wondrous things God has done for all the peoples. God is the God of gods—God is the Creator. God is the God of all people, and God is the ultimate judge of the earth. All of creation and heaven rejoices with God.

In Psalm 99, God is also called the God of the peoples. This psalm sings of what God has done for their ancestors, how Moses and Aaron, and later Samuel, were the priests of God and that God was with them in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night during their time in the wilderness. God is there God.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 contains the introduction to Paul’s letter. Considered the earliest of Paul’s letters, the letter opens by giving thanks for the church in Thessalonica and recalls how the Thessalonians turned from the gods of the Greeks around them to worship the one God, through Jesus Christ their Lord, in spite of facing persecution. The faith has spread from them to other towns and peoples, and Paul gives thanks for their faith and testimony of the one true God.

In Matthew 22:15-22, we read an account of a time Jesus was being tested by the Pharisees. Jesus faced questions and challenges from many different groups. Most often in the Gospel accounts, Jesus is challenged by Pharisees because he has the most in common with them: they believe in the resurrection of the dead, they believe in the importance of the law and the prophets. This time, they have brought the Herodians with them—the Greek Jews who were loyal to the Herods, puppet kings of the Roman Empire. They try to trap Jesus in a question about taxes, whether it was lawful to pay taxes to the Emperor or not, because they also pay the temple tax as Jews. But Jesus asks them a question of whose head is on the coin. It is a picture of Caesar, therefore give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s. Jesus doesn’t tell them to only pay the temple tax and not the Roman tax, but to remember that all things belong to God. Even Caesar is not above God, and all things that belong to Caesar ultimately belong to God, too.

In the Narrative Lectionary, 2 Samuel 12:1-9 contains a parable by the prophet Nathan that exposes David’s sin, of having an affair with Bathsheba and having her husband killed. Psalm 51:1-9 is a prayer attributed to David, having finally come to the point of confessing his sin. But David would not have admitted his sin without understanding the gravity of what he has done by viewing it through another lens—through the parable. Often, we can excuse what we have done, brush over the details and sweep it under the rug—but when we look through another point of view, when we put ourselves in the shoes of others, we can see the wrong that we have caused. Only then can we truly repent and seek to do justice—to restore what has been wronged.

Matthew 21:33-41 is the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, which was in the Revised Common Lectionary just a couple of weeks ago. The wicked tenants do not want to change their ways, do not want to listen, and their violence in resisting the landowner grows to the point of murdering his own son, though he did not intend for his son to die. So we, too, cause violence when we resist God’s ways and insist on our own—we cause violence to each other, to the earth, and ultimately to God when we harm our relationships.

How we view the world—our point of view—can be so narrow based solely on our own experience. Moses wanted to see the face of God and could not see the goodness of God was all around him, so he only saw his backside. The Pharisees and Herodians could only see that Jesus’ teachings made them look bad and disrupted their social order—instead of seeing the view that all things belong to God. And David could only see what he desired and wanted to keep things smooth and easy, so he went to the point of having Uriah killed—only when Nathan told his parable did David realize the harm he had caused. We have to be open to seeing things differently, to understanding our world through other’s eyes, in order to change and transform our own ways to be more like Christ.

Call to Worship

The world tells us we need to part of something big and bold;

 **We belong to God.**

The world tells us to put our hope in wealth and success;

 **We put our faith and trust in Jesus.**

The world tell us to seek our own gain and satisfaction;

 **We seek joy in the Spirit of God.**

Come, let us worship God, who leads us away from the ways of the world.

 **Let us follow and live into the Way of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that our point of view is often narrow. We see only what is in front of us—the easy way or the best way for ourselves, and we do not see how our actions may harm others. Forgive us for our short-sightedness. Open our minds to see that what makes things easy for us may make things much more difficult for others. Help us to see how our actions may harm others and creation, and ultimately You. Transform our lives so that we will help and serve others, rather than only ourselves. In the name of Christ, who calls us into repentance, forgiveness, and restoration, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

When we turn back to God, we find God has already turned towards us. God longs for us to seek goodness and mercy and to do justice and loving-kindness. When we live into God’s ways, we know that we are forgiven, that reconciliation is possible, that restoration is God’s desire for us. Live into the fullness of God’s desire for you. Amen.

Prayer

Jesus, our Companion in life, death and resurrection, call us into Your way of life. Guide us away from the ways of the world that tempt us to focus only on ourselves and our own gain. Keep us from the temptation to put ourselves above others, and instead open our minds to step into another’s shoes, to see through another’s point of view. May we be open to new ways of thinking, so that we might be reconciled and restored to one another. Lead us in Your ways of serving others, so that we might participate in your kin-dom here on earth. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.