Worship Resources for October 2, 2016—Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Lamentations 1:1-6 and 3:19-16 or Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; Psalm 37:1-9 or Psalm 137; 2 Timothy 1:1-14; Luke 17:5-10

Narrative Lectionary: The Promise of Passover, Exodus 12:1-13; 13:1-8 (Luke 22:14-20)

The book of Lamentations begins with the mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem and the people being taken into exile. Jerusalem is personified as a woman weeping bitterly, and all of her lovers (the gods of the other nations the leaders had looked to) have fled, leaving her alone and grieving, and her enemies are now victorious.

Lamentations continues in chapter 3 with words of despair, but then, despite the despair, the writer finds hope in the steadfast love of God that never ceases. The writer declares that God is good to the faithful who wait, and despite all the destruction and all they have been through, there is always hope for restoration with God.

The prophet Habakkuk sees only violence and destruction around him in the time of the exile. But God speaks through the prophet that there is still a vision of hope. God calls upon Habakkuk to make the vision plain so that others will understand. The proud will fail, but the righteous live by faith and hope.

The writer of Psalm 37:1-9 sings of trusting in God. When we put our trust in God, the psalmist proclaims, there is justice and peace. Commit yourselves to God’s ways and God will act towards justice. The psalmist tells the listener not to worry about those who are rich because of evil ways; God will restore the land to those who wait.

Psalm 137 is a song of lamentation of the people taken into Exile. Many songs have been formed out of these words over the years; however, the final verses are difficult to read. There is a very human response found there: a call for vengeance, a call for dashing the heads of their enemies’ babies against the rocks. We should shudder in horror as we read these verses, knowing that at times our own human response disgusts and horrifies us. God hears us, in our raw anger, and knows how we feel.

The letter of 2 Timothy purports to be from Paul to Timothy, but most scholars do not believe Paul wrote it. However, this is one of the pastoral Epistles, letters of pastoral encouragement and advice to early church leaders. In 1:1-14, Paul encourages Timothy by reminding him of his faith as told by Timothy’s mother and grandmother. Paul is in prison at this point, and is writing to encourage Timothy despite his imprisonment and suffering. Timothy, and the reader, are to be encouraged to continue on in the faith and teaching of Jesus Christ.

Luke 17:5-10 is a strange response from Jesus to the disciples. Jesus has just taught them about forgiveness and not being a stumbling block to others, and the disciples are whiny. “Increase our faith!” Because the disciples don’t think they can do it. Jesus responds, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed”—in other words, if they had any faith at all they would be able to follow Jesus. Jesus then uses a difficult analogy, for slavery was a common and accepted practice in his day, but something that abhors us now. Jesus tells them that just like slaves do what they are supposed to do, so the disciples ought to do what they are supposed to do. It is a problematic image for us today, and perhaps one that we need to reframe, for the analogy may cause more harm. But the message that we ought to have faith enough to forgive because Jesus forgives us is an important one. We ought to have faith to do the right thing because God does the right thing for us.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Promise of Passover in Exodus. God, through Moses, instructs the people to prepare a feast before they flee—making unleavened bread since they did not have time for bread to rise, and dashing the blood of the lamb on the doorposts to mark their door for the angel of death. The firstborn will now be consecrated to God, and this day will be told to their children—a promise that God will see them through this time of Exodus. This is the birth of a new nation, born out of slavery, entering freedom.

Jesus interrupts the celebration of the Passover in Luke 22:14-20 to declare a new ritual of remembrance. The story of life out of death, from slavery to freedom, in the Christian tradition is now lived out in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christians commemorate the Lord’s Supper, a ritual that had its beginning in the Passover story, but is a new story, a different story, one that we proclaim again and again, until Christ comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Our God is a God of life, a God who draws light out of darkness, a God who draws freedom out of slavery, a God who draws life out of death. Even in the midst of exile and destruction, the prophets found a glimpse of hope to hold on to. In the celebration of the Passover, when Jesus shocked his disciples by talking about his death, he gave hope in speaking of his resurrection. Hope is all around us, but sometimes we forget, and we fall into despair. We want Jesus to simply increase our faith, when the goodness of God is all around us.

Call to Worship

When the waters of life are unsteady,

**Hold on, trust in God, put your faith in Christ Jesus.**

When the road is long and the end is not in sight,

**Hold on, trust in God, put your faith in Christ Jesus.**

When the hill is too high and too hard to climb,

**Hold on, trust in God, put your faith in Christ Jesus.**

Remember, you are not on this journey alone;

**Remember, we have one another.**

We are the church, the body of Christ;

**Come, let us worship God, and put our hope in Christ Jesus,**

**who has brought us together. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we come to You in our brokenness, in our despair. There are times when our faith fails us, when we cannot see the end of the road we are on, or the calm of the storm. We cry out because of the injustice in our world. We cry out because we have failed to end racism. We cry out because we have failed to live into the best of our humanity. We need You, O Christ, to enter our lives and our world again. We need You, O Christ, to renew in us the call to love our neighbors as ourselves. We need You, O Christ, to renew in us our interconnectedness, that we are all created in Your image, and that we need one another. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (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 Your faithfulness. God’s love endures forever. God’s forgiveness is forever. You are renewed, restored, and loved. God and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of Oneness, of Wholeness, on this day, we remember that we are One Body in Christ. You have created us to be One, and today as we commemorate the Meal of Remembrance, we are united with our kindred around the world. We are one Church, one Body, of one faith. We are diverse and scattered, but in You we find our wholeness, and our unity. Help us to work towards restoration and unity in our own communities, workplaces, and schools. Help us to work for justice in our world and to partner with those who are different from us, because on this day, we remember that we are One in You. We all live on the same planet; we are all the same people, Your children. Call us into the unity of Your love for the sake of the world; not by coercion, but by genuine love, and working together for justice. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.