Worship Resources for October 20th—Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 31:27-34 or Genesis 32:22-31; Psalm 119:97-104 or Psalm 121; Luke 18:1-8; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

The prophet Jeremiah speaks to the people who are preparing to go into exile a message of both condemnation and salvation—the consequences for their actions have come upon them now, but the steadfast love of God will remain. There will be a New Covenant, written on the people’s hearts. Since we are made in the image of God, this is a covenant that cannot be broken, a covenant of love. The people will know God, and will be forgiven, their sins remembered no more. This covenant is a renewal of God’s love for the people, but more than that, it goes back to the beginning, to the created image of God in humanity that cannot be broken or forgotten.

Jacob wrestles a stranger in Genesis 32 while he is alone in the night. This stranger renames Jacob Israel, one who wrestles with God, for Jacob overcomes the stranger. As we know, the descendants of Jacob become known as Israel, and this image of Jacob wrestling an unknown person becomes a prophetic description of the people’s relationship with their God—a God who is very near to them and yet still mysterious. A God who blesses the people and also struggles to prevail God’s will upon the people. This passage serves a number of purposes: it explains the name Israel through the actions of Jacob, who represents his future people; it explains the people’s relationship with God; and it explains a dietary restriction for the people on eating meat from the hip socket. This is an incredibly rich passage for the history, culture and identity of the people of Israel as God’s people.

Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm; verses 97-104 speak about the law of God, the commandments God has set for the people and for the psalmist, these ordinances mark the way of life. The psalmist sings praise for God’s ways given to the people and that for those who are faithful to God’s ways, they find great joy in the words and the way.

Psalm 121 is a beautiful poem or song of God’s protection from birth to death, from beginning to end. God is not a God of the mountains, but the God *who made* the mountains. God is the Creator of All Things. And God watches over even us. God will be with us, always, and will keep us from evil.

Luke 18:1-8 contains the parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge. The widow’s persistence is what pays off in the end, not a change of heart by the judge. In standing up for justice, we are called to be persistent, because we may not change hearts or minds, but in staying true, we change ourselves. Our faith must also be persistent even in times of doubt and struggle—we may not change the minds of others, but we change ourselves. God is persistent with us, constantly reaching to us, and we must be the ones who change and turn towards God.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 is often cited as a prooftext for the Bible; the passage indeed says that “all scripture is inspired by God” in 3:16 but we must remember that the New Testament was not put together at that time; the Gospels were not written, the letters of Paul were being circulated and other letters such as 2 Timothy were being composed by disciples of Paul. Scripture in this case is referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, and probably there the Law and the Prophets as many of the Writings were still being collected. Different communities held up different Scriptures as more important than others, and to this day, we do the same, whether we hold up the New Testament over the Old Testament, or the Gospels over the Epistles, or the “authentic” letters of Paul over the other Letters—we need to be clear what we mean about Scripture, but knowing that all Scripture, according to this author, is inspired by God and useful. The writer encourages the listener/reader to persevere, to listen for the truth.

Faith is not just a journey, but a struggle. We all struggle at times with doubts but we perhaps struggle even more with being in community with one another. But our God is the God of community: the God of a people, the God of all peoples, the God of Creation. And we struggle and wrestle with one another and with God. But when we are persistent for justice, when we remain faithful to God’s ways—we will see it through. And while we may not change others, we may change the world for ourselves, and through persistence justice, peace, and hope may come.

Call to Worship

Wondrous, Amazing God, we gather in awe in Your presence

 **You created the Universe, and You are present with us in this space.**

Holy Spirit that came down on the disciples, You are moving within us.

 **You swept over the waters of creation, and You are in our very breath.**

Savior Jesus, You became flesh and lived and died for us.

 **You live again and give us the promise of new life.**

 **Triune God, Three-in-one, we praise, we pray, and we follow You in this world. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we come to You knowing we have fallen short in standing up for justice. We have looked to our own needs and our own desires and have failed to see the needs of others around us. We have given up, thought it was too hard, and have stopped believing we can make a difference. Forgive us for not trusting in Your belief in us. Forgive us for not seeing Your faithfulness to us. Turn our hearts again to be faithful to You, to trust in You, and to be persistent for You. In the name of Christ, who was persistent to the point of dying on the cross and rising in the Resurrection, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

We wrestle with God, and we are blessed by God. God has written the covenant on our hearts, and it cannot be broken. Our sins are forgiven, and remembered no more. Go forth living into this Good News, into this New Life, knowing that in our struggles God is with us until the end. Amen.

Prayer

God of Steadfast Love, You have loved us into creation, into being. You have raised us up to be people of life, and life is not without struggle, without doubts. Grant us courage and strength to persevere through the difficult times, and help us to encourage others along the journey. Remind us that we are part of a community; wherever two or three are gathered, You are among us. You call us to be community, to lift up one another and to bear one another’s burdens. Grant us the endurance needed to give to others, and to receive blessing and help when we need it. In the name of Christ, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.