Worship Resources for October 20th, 2019—Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: David Anointed King, 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 6:1-5; Psalm 150 (Mark 11:8-10)

The prophet Jeremiah gives a word of hope to the people going into exile in Jeremiah 31:27-34. Jeremiah speaks of a time when God will watch over them, and instead of destruction, God will see them build and plant. God will establish a new covenant, one that cannot be broken, for it is a covenant written in their hearts. They will be God’s people, and God will be with them. They will know God, and their sins will be forgiven and remembered no more.

In this portion of Psalm 119, the psalmist speaks of how they love God’s law and commandments in vs. 97-104. The psalmist keeps to God’s word, knowing the words from God are as sweet as honey, and through keeping God’s commandments and ordinances, the psalmist has gained wisdom and understanding.

Jacob wrestles with an angel in the second selection from the Hebrew scriptures, in Genesis 32:22-31. Jacob is on his way to encounter his brother—the very brother he cheated his birthright and inheritance from—and is preparing to face what is to come. Alone, at night, a stranger comes upon him and they wrestle until daybreak. The stranger manages to knock Jacob’s hip socket out of joint, but Jacob does not let go, knowing that this is a spiritual being, a messenger from God, and Jacob demands a blessing from him—perhaps because he knows he has to meet up with Esau and he sees this as a sign. But the angel gives him a new name: Israel, one who wrestles with God. Jacob realizes he has seen God face to face and lived (in that time and culture, it was common belief that if one looked upon the face of God, they would die), and that he is indeed blessed by this encounter with God.

Psalm 121 sings a reminder that God is the one who brings help to those in need. Not the mountains, but the one who made the mountains, who made heaven and earth. God is the one who guards and keeps us from all evil, and watches over us from our beginnings to our endings all our life long.

The writer of 2 Timothy reminds the receiver of the letter the importance of what they’ve been taught in 3:14-4:5. When the writer speaks of scripture, they are referring to the Hebrew scriptures—the Torah and the Prophets, and some of the writings such as Psalms that were collected by that time. The writings of Paul were not considered scripture yet, and the Gospels and Acts had not yet been written. The writings and teachings passed on to them equip them to proclaim the message with persistence and with patience. The writer warns that a time will come when the people will turn away to teachings that are more favorable to listen to, rather than the truth of what must be said. The writer encourages the receivers of this letter to carry out the ministry given to them.

Jesus tells a parable of a persistent widow in Luke 18:1-8. There was once a judge who didn’t care about anyone, had no respect for people or for God. And there was a widow who kept coming to him and demanding justice. Eventually, the judge is worn down by her persistence and grants her the justice she seeks. Jesus uses this story as an example of how God will listen because God does care about the people and their suffering, and God will grant justice to those who cry out. But “when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” In other words, will the people give up so easily? Will the people be persistent in their pursuit of justice and seeking God, or will they wring their hands and give up?

The Narrative Lectionary has followed a theme of names and identity this season, and this week focuses on David anointed as king. David unifies all the tribes under one throne, and has the Ark brought to Jerusalem, uniting the spiritual home with the throne. Psalm 150, historically ascribed to David, is a song of praise for God that brings all the earth into praise. David gives the people of Israel a new identity as a nation under one king and one God, with the temple (to be built by his son Solomon) in Jerusalem.

Mark’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem in Mark 11:8-10 invokes the entry of a king into Jerusalem. The people proclaim, “blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!” Once again, the city as seen as the head, the throne, for both the spiritual home and political home of the people.

“Nevertheless, she persisted,” was meant to be words of warning, words that derided the actions of another, and they have become a mantle call. The widow in Jesus’ parable was seen as annoying and troublesome to the judge, and yet she persisted, and was granted justice. The people, as they were taken into exile, maintained hope in God that they would someday return home, that what was taken would be restored. David did the impossible—uniting twelve tribes under one throne—though not without a great cost, and it wouldn’t last. But through the songs and stories of our ancestors of faith we can learn that persistence leads to endurance, and endurance leads to hope, and hope cannot be quenched.

Call to Worship (paraphrased from Psalm 150)

Praise the Lord!

 **Praise God in the sanctuary! Praise God under the sky!**

Praise God for all God’s mighty deeds!

 **Praise God for God’s incredible goodness!**

Praise God with musical instruments!

 **Praise God with dance and song!**

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

 **Praise the Lord!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Steadfast Love, we confess that we are weary and worn down. The journey for justice is long, winding, and uphill. We strive for basic human decency and rights, and cannot fathom why others hold on to power and privilege in ways that harm others. We are tired, O God. Tired of the journey, tired of the struggle. But You are the God of Steadfast Love, a love that never ceases, a love that renews and restores us. Renew us, O God. Restore us to the path of justice, O God. Grant us strength and courage to keep on. Give us endurance for the journey, that we would not stop seeking justice for all, for only then will we know peace. In the name of Christ, who did not give up even unto death, and calls us by name into this way of life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Christ urges us on, calling us to speak truth to power, to work for justice for all. We do not journey alone. God has given us one another. Know that you matter to God. Know that you are loved. Know that your work in this world for justice is valued. Lean on one another, and grant each other rest, knowing that your love for one another is inspired by your love for God, and you will see this through. God is with you, now and always. Amen.

Prayer

O God of Persistence, You pursue our hearts in a world where there are so many distractions. You pursue us and are relentless, showing us the ways of justice and mercy, showing us how Your ways lead to peace. You never give us up, not for a moment. When we feel alone, O God, You are present with us. When we fall away, O God, You continue to turn our hearts and heads back to You. When we forget You, O God, You continue to show us that You are at work in our world and in our lives. May we turn back to You, and be persistent in our own pursuit of love, justice, and mercy. Amen.