Worship Resources for October 21st, 2018—Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-27; 12:1-9; Psalm 51:1-9 (Matthew 21:33-41)

After thirty-six chapters of Job arguing with his friends and one stranger (the first two chapters are the setup of the story, of God and Satan’s wager, of Job losing everything), God finally answers Job out of the whirlwind. One can imagine this encounter as utterly terrifying. God counters Job’s demanding questions of “where is God?” with God’s own demanding question: “Who is this that questions me, and where were you?” Where was Job while God was creating and caring for the universe and all of creation? Where was Job when God was planting in us wisdom and understanding? When we accuse God of being absent, where are we?

The psalmist is in awe of God in Psalm 104:1-9, 24, 35c. They praise God for God’s greatness, describing God as crossing the sky in a chariot made of clouds, the tent of God being the heavens stretched across the sky. God is the one who sets the boundaries of creation (echoing the words of God in Job 38), and in wisdom, God has made everything, all of creation.

One of the Suffering Servant passages, Isaiah 53:4-12 speaks of the people of Israel personified, having gone through the suffering of the destroying of their temple and being taken into exile. The suffering servant will be lifted up as an example among the nations. They will survive, despite their rejection by other nations. But they will emerge in victory, and all nations will know of God because of their suffering.

The psalmist declares that God will deliver the faithful from evil and death in Psalm 91:9-16. God hears the call of the faithful and will keep them safe from harm. God’s angels will guard the faithful ones. Because God is their dwelling place, their own homes will be safe from evil.

The Epistle lesson continues in Hebrews 5:1-10. All high priests have to offer a sacrifice for their own sins as well as the sins of the people, but Christ became both high priest and sacrifice. Because Christ was without sin, Christ’s sacrifice ended the sacrificial system altogether. Christ was obedient to God and suffered, but also offered prayers as a priest does. Taking an obscure priest found in Hebrew scripture (only mentioned in Genesis 14:18 and Psalm 100:4), the writer of Hebrews declares that Christ is in this obscure line of priests, and is a priest forever, therefore always interceding for us.

Two disciples, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approach Jesus in Mark 10:35-45, and ask that they sit on his side in glory. They have understood that Jesus is going to reign as a new king, but still do not understand what that means. They declare they can drink his cup and be baptized by his baptism, but they don’t understand that the way of Christ leads through death into life. They are still thinking in this world’s terms when it comes to a reign and kingdom. Jesus declares that whoever wishes to become great must become a servant. Whoever wishes to be first must serve all. The Son of Man, Jesus tells them, came not to be served by to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. The kingdom Jesus proclaims is not of this world.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to the story of David and Bathsheba found in 2 Samuel 11-12. This is a disturbing story, and we must understand that Bathsheba did not have a choice in this. When the king sends for you, you go. When the king makes you lie with him, you do it. It is a story of sexual assault, though we have not always told it that way. David was supposed to have gone off to war as the other kings did, but he was at home. He was not doing what he ought to have been doing when he spies on Bathsheba and sends for her. Then, when Bathsheba tells David that she’s pregnant, he tries to hide it and ends up having her husband killed in war (by moving him to the front lines) to cover up what he has done. It isn’t until the prophet tells a parable that gets David riled up, and Nathan reveals that the parable is about David, that he recognizes he has sinned. We can appreciate that in the scripture, the blame is solely on David and what he has done in terms of both the murder of Bathsheba’s husband and the way he was killed in war, and the assault of Bathsheba.

In Psalm 51:1-9, often attributed to David after Nathan revealed what David had done, the writer confesses their sins to God. The writer goes directly to God to seek cleansing from their sin, and declares that against God alone have they sinned. They know that God has the power to forgive and make new.

Matthew 21:33-41 contains a parable that Jesus told of a landowner who leased his vineyard to tenants, but when the landowner sent his servants to collect produce from the land, the tenants beat them and killed some. The landowner sends his son, but his son is also killed. Jesus asks those listening what they think the landowner will do with the tenants, and they say the landowner will have the tenants put to death and will lease the land to someone else.

Both the Revised Common Lectionary and Narrative Lectionary contain difficult passages this week. Sometimes the response of God in Job may seem heartless, for all Job’s been through. The Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah have often been interpreted by Christians to be about Jesus, ignoring what the people of Israel were going through at the time and the message they needed to hear from God. The story of David and Bathsheba has been told as a story of adultery rather than a story of sexual assault, and in light of what has happened in our world, we need to tell the story with an eye on how Bathsheba has suffered, how even her own story has been erased. Sometimes we don’t know what we’re saying when we say the same old story the same way—and Jesus reminds us of that. When James and John come to him seeking to sit by him in his reign, they don’t know what they are asking. They don’t understand the story they are part of. God’s story is not the same as the story we’ve created, the kingdoms and ways of this world. Jesus is calling us into a new story.

Call to Worship

Who is the one who made the heavens and the earth?

**God is the Architect of the Universe, the Designer of All Things.**

Who has given our hearts wisdom, and our minds understanding?

**God is our Creator, the Maker of us All.**

Who provides for all creatures, who gives us seasons, rain and sun?

**God is the One Who Provides, and cares for all of creation.**

Whom do we seek with all our heart, mind and soul?

**We seek God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Friend.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess to You that we have failed to tell the whole story. We see only in part, and we make assumptions and quick judgments. We have failed to listen to victims, to the marginalized and oppressed. We have failed to notice those who continue to suffer. We tell stories that center ourselves instead of those in need. Forgive us for our flawed tales. Forgive us for our short-sightedness. Forgive us for failing to take a step back, to see and listen and understand more deeply. Call us into the ways of Your justice and mercy. Guide us to become Your beloved community here on earth by aligning with the poor and downtrodden, the ones often forgotten and rejected. In the name of Christ, who was rejected, despised, suffered, and now lives, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are God’s beloved child. You are part of God’s story that is still being written. It is always time to turn the page and begin a new chapter. It is always time to turn back to God and start fresh, and God is with you, in this moment, now. Breathe deep all the new possibilities. Breathe deep the newness of life. Breathe deep into God’s forgiveness, healing, and restoration. Amen.

Prayer

Sweet, Sweet Spirit, whether it is autumn or spring in our world, breathe a new spirit into us. Create in us new hearts for love and forgiveness, for grace and mercy. Call forth in us a renewed sense of purpose and being: to love one another, to care for this earth and its creatures, and to do justice. Breathe a new spirit into us now, so we might have courage for the journey ahead. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.