Worship Resources for October 22, 2017—Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: God Calls David, 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 51:10-14 (John 7:24)

Moses speaks with God on Sinai in Exodus 33:12-23. Moses asks God’ s presence to be made known to the people, but then more specifically asks for God to “show me your glory.” God declares that all their goodness will pass by Moses, and the name of the Lord will be proclaimed, but that God cannot show their face to Moses. In the ancient religions of the Mediterranean it was thought that one would die if they saw the face of God, so God promises to pass by Moses while he is in the cleft of the rock, and Moses will see God’s back, but not God’s front. In a sense, we only see the goodness of God in the aftermath. While the people are going through the journey in the wilderness, both good times and struggling times, God is with them, but they will only recognize the goodness of God in the aftermath.

The psalmist praises God in Psalm 99, for God is the people’s king. Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were priests and prophets of God. The psalmist calls upon the people to praise God for God’s acts of justice, and recalls God’s forgiveness and mercy. The psalmist recalls how God gave the ordinances and statutes to lead the people. As God spoke to the people through Moses on the mountain, so the psalmist calls the people to worship God upon his holy mountain.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of how God used the Persian ruler Cyrus to free the people from exile. Though Cyrus doesn’t know God, God is the one calling him, anointing him (the word used here is Messiah) and using him to free the Hebrew people, and how God is making themselves known to the whole world by this act. God is revealing themselves to the world by calling Cyrus, a non-Israelite, to lead the people out of exile.

Sing to the Lord, the psalmist begins in Psalm 96, but this is a song for all the earth. God is the God of all people, who made heaven and earth, and is the true king of all nations. God is above all the other gods, idols made by people; only God made the heaven and earth and is the God of all people.

Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians begins with gratitude. Paul is grateful for the church in Thessalonica and their steadfast faith in Christ. The Thessalonian Church had turned away from idols to serve the true God and to wait for Christ, whom Paul was assured would return. The faithfulness of this church had been told in other churches, and Paul was delighted for the ways they had lived out the teachings of Christ.

“Give what belongs to Caesar to Caesar, and what belongs to God to God,” Jesus told the religious leaders, who were trying to trap him. In Matthew 22:15-22 the Pharisees hoped to trap Jesus, so they even conspired with the Herodians—Hellenistic Jews who were less traditionally religious and more bound to the Roman government. If Jesus was a true rebel, he would say something that would offend them. But Jesus did not. Instead, Jesus preached that the kingdom was not of this world.

In the Narrative Lectionary, God calls upon the prophet Samuel to anoint a new king in 1 Samuel 16:1-13. Saul has failed to live up to God’s intention, turning away from God’s ways, and Samuel has somewhat taken this personally. Instead, God calls Samuel to check out the sons of Jesse, and Samuel looks them over, but the one God has chosen isn’t there. Jesse’s youngest son is out with the sheep, and he is the one God chose. God often chooses the undesirable—the youngest, the smallest, the weakest—and flips the world upside down by doing so. God chooses the underdog, and David was the underdog. God tells Samuel not to look on the outside, but it’s what is on the inside that counts.

Psalm 51 is often attributed to David, a song often thought to be sung after David recognizes his sin in front of the prophet Nathan. The psalmist asks for a new and clean heart, and a new and bright spirit, to serve the God of Salvation.

Jesus tells the people not to judge by appearances in John 7:24, but rather to use right judgment. Jesus is speaking about appearances, how none of the people truly keep the law, but they judge others by it.

God is the God of all people, the God of the whole earth. God does not often choose the right person for the job in our eyes—God chose Moses, who was afraid to speak in public. God chose Cyrus, a Persian king, to help lead the people out of exile. God chose David, the youngest of the brothers, to be king over Israel, even though he would fail time and again. God chose Paul, a flawed man who once persecuted believers, to be the apostle to the Gentiles. God chooses us, again and again, especially when we don’t think we’re worthy, especially when we think there would be someone else better for the job. Nope. God needs us, warts and all, flaws and shortcomings, because we know what to ask for: pure and clean hearts. Forgiveness. Courage to do the right thing.

Call to Worship

Listen! God is calling you by name,

 **To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.**

Listen! God is calling you by name,

 **To follow Jesus, to become last of all and servant of all.**

Listen! God is calling you by name,

 **To love the Lord your God, and to love your neighbor as yourself.**

Listen! God is calling you by name,

 **God is calling each of us into this time of worship, to pray and listen for the call of God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we confess that at times we think we deserve more, that we are more important than others, that we know better than others. Forgive us of our arrogance. We think we own no one nothing, but we owe You everything. We think as long as we don’t hurt others intentionally, we have done enough, when we have not seen our own privilege, and how our unintentional words and actions can cause harm. Forgive us of our short-sightedness. Remind us that we are called to owe one another love, and that love calls us to see the injustice our neighbors face, and calls us to take responsibility, both for our intended and unintended consequences of our words and actions. Call us into Your ways of love, justice, and reconciliation. In the name of Christ, who reconciles all of us to You, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s love is in you. God’s love is working through you. God’s love is flowing from you to others in every act of kindness, in every act of justice, in every act of mercy. Be filled with God’s love, and know you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Now go: forgive, love, and restore. Amen.

Prayer

God Who Chooses, You have chosen us to be Your disciples. You have called us by name to follow You. You have chosen this world to plant and grow and mold and shape. You have chosen to love us despite our sins, despite our desire to reap worldly success and plunder the bountiful earth You made. You have chosen to forgive us despite the harm we continue to cause others and creation. You have chosen to be reconciled to us through Christ Jesus who gave his life for us. You choose us again and again. Help us to choose You always. Amen.