Worship Resources for October 26th, 2014—Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Deuteronomy 34:1-12 or Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18; Psalm 1 or Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17; 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8; Matthew 22:34-46

Narrative Lectionary: Solomon’s Wisdom, 1 Kings 3:4-28 (Matthew 6:9-10)

We are nearing the end of our journey with the family of our ancestors Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel and Leah and the rest of their family. We have followed them into Egypt and then into the wilderness led by Moses. In this reading in Deuteronomy, we read of God’s renewing of the promise to the people through Moses, though Moses himself dies before he reaches the Promised Land—he is able to witness to hope, feel the nearness of the end of the journey, know that God has kept the covenant and has remained faithful. Moses knows God’s faithfulness even though Moses does not experience the fulfilment of the promise made long ago.

In our second thread of the Hebrew Scriptures, we take a break from the prophetic and instead turn to the Law for instruction in Leviticus and hear the teachings of the law about how we ought to relate to others—to be just, to not gossip, to not hate or seek vengeance. This culminates in the summation of the law into this: love your neighbor as yourself.

Psalm 1 gives the listener two options: to be like trees, rooted firmly and knowing where they stand, or to be like chaff, just blown about wherever the wind takes you. The ones who follow God and God’s ways are like the trees; the wicked are like the chaff, doing whatever pleases them on a whim. The psalmist sings that those who follow the way of God find delight in the law of the Lord.

Psalm 90 is split into two parts in our lectionary; the first part the psalmist sings of God’s mighty acts in creation, that God is the God who gives new life, can sweep back the hands of time and start over. In the second half, however, the psalmist pleads with God to no longer wait for justice to be done, to deliver the people from what they are facing right then. The psalmist knows that God works in God’s time, but also knows that God hears our prayers and cries of despair.

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8 shares Paul’s dismay of having arrived to conflict at the church in Philippi (note that this letter is written before the letter to the Philippians, so that conflict seems to have died down by the time of the letter of Paul to that church), and is grateful for the welcome of the Thessalonians. Paul and his companions have come because of the Gospel of Christ, but they continue to share with the Thessalonians because they have love for one another.

Matthew 22:34-46 is Jesus’ answer to the question “What is the greatest commandment?” Jesus says it is to Love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus further says that on this hang all the law and the prophets. The Law and the Prophets were the Bible that they knew—the rest of the writings (Psalms, Proverbs, other books, etc) were still being compiled, but the prophetic books were gathered together along with the Torah. This is the meaning of the whole of their scripture at that time, and it is still the meaning of the whole of our scripture today: to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We cannot love God without loving our neighbor, and if we love our neighbor, we love God. Furthermore, Jesus then turns and asks a question of the Pharisees: whose son is the Messiah? Jesus shows that the Messiah cannot be the son of David, but rather is the son of God. The Messiah shows the ways of God, not humanity—not even a good king. Because human beings will always make excuses and exceptions to rules, but not God. God calls upon us to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Solomon’s Wisdom, that he asks God for wisdom above all else, and because he does that, God also grants him everything he could ever want. The passage also contains the famous story of the two women who both claimed to be the mother of a child, and Solomon’s wise (but very harsh) way of determining who the real mother was. Solomon sought wisdom in his judgments, which was to give justice to the poor and the widow. But as we know, other desires would soon tug him away from justice and he would fall from God’s ways. But when we seek to do the right thing, to follow God’s ways and seek the well-being of others, we seek God’s wisdom above worldly wisdom that would say “What is in it for me?”

Matthew 6:9-10 is just the first part of Jesus’ prayer that we know as the Lord’s Prayer, acknowledging the holiness of God’s name, and seeking for God’s kingdom to come and will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus prays, and teaches us to pray for God’s wisdom, which is God’s ways, and to do them on earth, rather than to follow the ways we have created in our world that cause us to seek our own gain.

Love is the commandment: to love God and to love one another. In the Gospel of John and in the letters of John, we hear more clearly that when we love one another, we love God. The way of God is love. When we love one another, we seek one another’s well-being. We put their needs above our wants. We build a better community, we care for the earth that God has given us—we follow all the law and the prophets. We follow God’s ways. It really is that simple. And yet it is the hardest thing for us to do, for those that live into God’s ways are also moved to call out injustice and to stand against it. And what happens to them? Look at Jesus, the prophets, Paul, Martin Luther King, Jr. and others. It’s not an easy life. To stand against the ways of the world may quicken your death. But we have no fear of death in Christ Jesus.

Call to Worship

For those who have not been welcomed before,

 **You are welcomed by Christ here.**

For those who have been turned away,

 **Christ is opening the door for you.**

For those who have been forgotten,

 **God cannot forget you, for God made you.**

Come, join together in worship of our God.

 **You are God’s beloved. We welcome each other in the name of Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Savior Jesus, we come to You knowing that we have not followed Your ways. We have blamed those who are in need around us for their own struggles. We have crossed our arms and given smug looks to those who have nothing, and blamed them for their own misfortunes. Forgive us for our arrogance and ignorance. Forgive us because we do not see our neighbors as our brothers and sisters. Forgive us, because You love us and have forgiven us, but we have failed to share that love and care with others. Call us into Your ways of justice, peace and mercy. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is the one who loves us always. God is the one who makes us new again. God is the one who sees our foolishness and our self-righteousness and arrogance, and sets us back on the path of humility, loving us every step of the way. God’s grace is for all of us, and we are forgiven, renewed and restored, but most of all, we are loved always. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of All Seasons, we come to You in this turning of the season, experiencing Your beauty in creation at work all around us. Remind us that we, too, are still works in progress. You are continuing to help us be shaped into the people You have called us to be. We still have much to learn and grow, no matter our age on earth. As the season turns, may we see a new point of view, experience a new way of living, and know that only Your love is steadfast and unchanging in our turning world. In the name of Jesus, who fulfills the promise of love that succeeds death, we pray all things. Amen.