Worship Resources for October 27th—Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Joel 2:23-32 or Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22; Psalm 84:1-7 or Psalm 65; Luke 18:9-14; 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

The prophet Joel declares the hope of the future, the promise of a God who will deliver them from the evil they see in their day, though they may not see it in their lifetime. There is hope for restoration and a promise of new life, but even more: a promise of the coming of the Spirit upon the people, and the revelation of the day of the Lord, the day of judgment. God’s judgment is not about punishment, but about restoration. Those who look to God will see and experience restoration; those who have turned from God’s ways will experience loss and devastation, but God’s desire is for restoration, for a bountiful future with hope.

Jeremiah 14 shows two voices: the first is the people, pleading for God’s deliverance because God is their God. The second is the Lord, who declares that since the people have left God, God has left the people, allowing them to experience rejection. But in verses 19-22, the people come back, asking God for mercy, acknowledging that they have fallen away and that the punishment they experience is their own rejection of God, entering into the absence of God. Now, they acknowledge that it is God who is the Creator, God who restores, and God who is the promise of hope.

Psalm 84:1-7 sings praise of God who is our home, God who is our shelter, God who is the one who is our strength. God is the God of Creation, and in God we find our joy, our contentment, our being.

Psalm 65 also sings of the God of Creation, singing praise for the God who provides for the whole earth, rain and harvest and new growth. All of creation sings praise back to God because all of creation’s beauty is a song of praise. The strength of God is found in the strength of creation, which constantly renews with the seasons.

Luke 18:9-14 contains a short parable of Jesus, about trusting in one’s own righteousness. Jesus uses the example of a Pharisee and a tax collector, figures that would have been common in his day—a Pharisee would have been someone who was respectable and a tax collector would have been despised; he uses these figures and flips the stereotype—the Pharisee ends up being the one who is self-righteous, looking pleased with himself and it is the tax collector who is humble, looking for forgiveness from God. We have to understand that Jesus was not saying Pharisees were self-righteous and stuck-up; rather, Jesus was playing on the understanding that Pharisees would have been humble, looking to God and seeking the welfare of others. This is not always our understanding of Pharisees as Christians, but we have to see that Jesus used them as an example often by flipping the stereotype. In this case, the tax collector, who would have been despised, is the one that shows humility and seeks God.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 contains familiar words of perseverance, of keeping the faith and finishing the race. When we see our faith through, sticking through with God when everything else around us fails us, we know that God will see us through to the end. Similar to the psalms of old, the writer shares that God will be their defender, their strength, and their endurance.

Our life of faith can be trying, at times seeming even meaningless. We feel the pressures around us and wonder where God is. Sometimes our own choices have taken us away from God; but God remains faithful to us. But it is up to us to turn back and see that God has been with us all along. We may leave God, but God cannot leave us. And if we stick with it, we will see that God has seen us through, all along.

Call to Worship

We come to God, acknowledging our shortcomings, but knowing we are forgiven

 **We come to rejoice in God our Savior!**

We come to pray, knowing we have fallen short, but that God lifts us up

 **We come to praise God who hears our prayers!**

We come to be with each other, for we are on the journey of faith together

 **We come to be the body of Christ, for we need each other.**

 **Come, let us worship our God and join together in praise and celebration!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy Spirit, You guide us, directing our paths, and yet we stray away. We go after fleeting desires and impulsive whims, forgetting Your love for us that desires so much more than what the world can give. Forgive us for following false idols and quick satisfaction that fades away. Lead us to the path of righteousness, of justice, and help us to see this life through, knowing that Your blessings are always with us. In the name of Jesus, who walks with us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God leads us to still waters and green pastures. God leads us through the valley of the shadow and sees us through. Don’t give up. Don’t stay in the darkness. The light is coming; indeed, the light is already with you. Go and live as the Light of the World. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, You made the heavens and earth, the rivers that flow from the mountains to the sea. We can only see the part of the river that is before us, though we know where it came from and where it ends. Help us to trust in You as we trust that we know where the river is going, though we cannot see the end. Help us to trust the current of Your guidance through the Holy Spirit in our life, with Christ as our companion, knowing that You who created the world also created us, and that the future with hope lies before us. In Your name, Triune God, we pray. Amen.