Worship Resources for Sunday, October 28th—Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Job 42:1-6, 10-17 or Jeremiah 31:7-9; Psalm 34:1-8 or Psalm 126; Mark 10:46-52; Hebrews 7:23-28

We end our saga of Job with Job’s recognition that he was trying to understand God in human terms, when God is the creator of the whole universe, beyond our understanding. Job also has his fortunes restored and a new family, a family that includes three daughters who are named, something very unusual for the Bible and unusual for this time. While we often feel the absence of God when we are going through difficult times, sometimes it is only after we have gone through such a valley of the shadow that we recognize God has been with us all along. But not all will receive the same kind of blessings Job has. We all know people who have suffered such terrible losses that it is hard for their faith to recover. Job gives us hope, but we need to be careful to remember that God does not promise to give us everything back we have lost: God does promise for restoration, and God’s restoration is not necessarily an earthly restoration. I am reminded of the passage in Mark 10:28-31 that was in the lectionary recently in which Jesus declares that those who have lost, who have given up for the kingdom will gain everything back—along with persecutions. To follow God in faith does not mean everything turns out ok as we want it to—but everything will be restored, in God’s way, and in God’s time.

Jeremiah 31:7-9 sings the praise of God who will redeem Israel. Jeremiah proclaims that God will indeed bring Israel back from the exile, though they will have dwindled, this remnant shall return, and the remnant will include the blind, the lame, children, pregnant women and those in labor—all those who would normally be lagging behind, those who may have been abandoned by those who wanted to save themselves—in other words, the last and the least—this is who God desires to bring back. This is who God desires to return, and God will be like a father to them. We are reminded that those who are on the margins, those who are oppressed—those who are often forgotten are the ones God remembers, and who God desires to be part of God’s family.

Psalm 34:1-8 sings of God’s deliverance of those who seek God, how God does not forget those who cry out to God. “Taste and see,” reminds us that our experience of God fills our senses, that our experiences of God go beyond understanding. God is good, and God will deliver us.

Psalm 126 sings praise to God who has delivered the people from exile, who has restored “the fortunes of Zion.” God has turned their mourning to dancing, their weeping to praise. Though they have been through such peril, God has delivered them safely on the other side. We are reminded of the story of Job, that God is beyond our understanding, God is the creator of the universe, and while we rejoice when God restores us, we need to have a greater rejoicing that God is involved in all of the works of the universe.

Mark 10:46-52 is the story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus, a blind beggar. In Jesus’ day, if you were blind, you could not work, and once you were grown, there was no one to help you. You had to beg to survive. The healing of Bartimaeus does three things: Bartimaeus can now see, Bartimaeus no longer has to beg, and Bartimaeus serves as a witness and metaphor to others—God can remove what is in the way of our vision, what is causing us to stumble, what is causing us to be stuck, what is causing us to remain oppressed. And God calls us to do what we can to help others “see”—to help remove the walls of oppression and share opportunities for all people, to bring in the marginalized and oppressed. Our faith can make us well, if we are willing to live by faith, and that faith calls us to see the ways others are oppressed—to remove the blinders from our eyes and see our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Hebrews 7:23-28 continues the discourse on the role of priests in the Hebrew tradition and the role of Jesus as the new High Priest. Jesus is a priest forever—we have no one on earth we need to go to in order to reach God. Jesus is the final sacrifice—there is nothing we need to do to attain God’s grace, it is given for us, and there is no reason to shed any more blood. Jesus’s death conquers death in his resurrection—there is no longer any need to fear death. It is hard for us to understand, but coming from the Hebrew tradition, the writer of Hebrews explains the role of Jesus, his death and resurrection, in the terms of the priesthood which would have been understood by those familiar with the temple religious system. And in the aftermath of the temple being destroyed in 70AD, it also explains why there is no need for the temple or the priests anymore, for Jesus has come to and for us.

Life is not easy. We have learned from the walk of Job, however, that God is active in the world and in all of the universe around us, even though we may experience God’s absence in our own lives. Our focus can be very small and narrow. We may worry or be upset about what happens to us, forgetting about the fact that there are 7 billion people on earth. We may feel that God has abandoned us and forget that no asteroid has wiped out the earth yet. We may be like Bartimaeus, blind to what is going on in the world, crying out to God to let us see, then realizing there is a greater world beyond us. Or we may be like Bartimaeus, marginalized by the world, unable to do anything but beg until God and others intervene on our behalf. In other words: it’s not all about us, and yet, it is all about us. God heard the cry of Job. Jesus heard the cry of Bartimaeus. God hears our cries, and God is active in our lives, though we may have a hard time understanding that when we are in our valley of the shadow. Nonetheless, God is there.

Call to Worship

God’s beauty is in the sun and rain, the clouds and snow and wind—

Open our eyes, that we might see You, Creator God.

God’s voice is in the cries of the prophets, the cries of the poor and the oppressed—

Open our ears, that we might hear You, Creator God.

God’s work is active in our world, in justice and peace and reconciliation—

Open our hands, that we might serve You, Creator God.

God’s love is found where children play, where people pray, where two or three are gathered—

Open our hearts, that we might love You, Creator God.

Come, taste and see that the Lord is good! Come and worship our Creator!

Prayer of Confession/Prayer of Brokenness

God of justice and righteousness, we confess that we have sought our own gain. We have put our own wounds and hurts above the violence done to others. We have cried out selfishly about ourselves while ignoring how our own actions oppress and contribute to the injustice of others. Forgive us, O God, for not seeing the bigger picture. Forgive us for not recognizing our part in systems of injustice. Call us into Your ways of righteousness and justice. Call us into Your ways of speaking on behalf of the poor and oppressed. Call us into Your ways of building up hope and restoration. In the name of Jesus, who brings healing and forgiveness, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God’s steadfast love endures forever. God’s mercies are renewed every morning. There is nothing we can do that will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are loved, forgiven, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Loving God, we come to pray and praise, to meditate and be mindful. Open our minds to new understandings, and our hearts to new people. Call us out of comfort, out of our fear of change, and into a sense of wonder and amazement at the world You created that keeps renewing around us. Guide our feet onto Your path into the world, so that we might learn how best to love one another, how best to live with one another, and how best to do Your work in our world. Renew in us the wonder and amazement of being Your children, here on earth, sent to do Your work. Call us into the world, loving Parent, loving God, loving Mother and Father of us all. Amen.