Worship Resources for October 28th, 2018—Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost, Reformation Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Job 42:1-6, 10-17 and Psalm 34:1-8 (19-22); Jeremiah 31:7-9 and Psalm 126; Hebrews 7:23-38; Mark 10:46-52

Narrative Lectionary: Solomon’s Wisdom, 1 Kings 3:4-9, (10-15), 16-28 (Matthew 6:9-10)

The first selection in the Hebrew Scriptures concludes its series on Job. Job responded to God, who finally answered him, and Job recognized that he was in over his head. He had accused God of being absent without knowing what God was up to. Now that Job knows, he feels foolish and repents, knowing how little he is in the vastness of the universe. However, God restores Job after Job repents and prays for his friends. The point is not that God restores everything because Job repents, but rather that God was always present in the universe, and God is always doing the work of restoration: in the universe, on the earth, and even in our lives. God’s intention for us is not to suffer, but when we do, God is at work in the restoration.

The psalmist sings praise for God’s deliverance in Psalm 34:1-8 (19-22). The psalmist calls upon the congregation to bless and magnify the Lord. God heard their cries and saved them in their time of trouble. Though even the righteous will suffer, God will see them through, if they seek refuge in God.

The prophet Jeremiah declares that God will save a remnant of Israel and they will return from exile. In Jeremiah 31:7-9, the prophet proclaims that among those saved will be the blind and the lame, as well as those pregnant and small children. In other words, the people often forgotten by the leadership of Jeremiah’s day, the ones on the margins, the ones who suffered—they will be the ones who will experience the return, and God shall be like a father to them.

Psalm 126 is a song of praise for God’s deliverance in ancient days, a song of hope for a people who have experienced great hardship. The psalmist prays that God may deliver them once again; the memory of past joys still present, the hope of restoration still believed in.

The Epistle reading continues with the letter of Hebrews, 7:23-28. Jesus is the perfect priest, and the last and final priest needed. Because Jesus lives forever, there is no need for the priesthood to continue as they have known it. Jesus also does not need to sacrifice first for his own sins, since he is sinless. The sacrificial system for followers of Jesus ended with Christ’s death and resurrection. He is the last and final sacrifice, perfect and holy, and our priest forever.

Bartimaeus, a beggar on the side of the road, calls out to Jesus in Mark 10:46-52. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing him by, along with the disciples and a large crowd, he called out to Jesus, but others tried to keep him quiet. It isn’t until Jesus heard him and said, “Call him here,” that those around Bartimaeus began to help him, telling him that Jesus was calling him. He sprang up, throwing off his cloak, and when Jesus asked Bartimaeus what it is he wanted, Bartimaeus declared, “My teacher, let me see again!” Jesus told him that his faith made him well, and he immediately regained his sight, and he followed Jesus on the way.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to Solomon. The son of David and Bathsheba, Solomon didn’t seek power or wealth, but wisdom. God was pleased that this is what Solomon asked for, and not anything else; but God granted Solomon wisdom along with power and wealth. Solomon’s wisdom was tested almost immediately when two women came before him, both claiming a child as their own. In this famous story, Solomon told the women they were to divide “the living boy” in two so each could have half. But one of the women cried out to give the child to the other woman, for she’d rather the child live with the other woman than to have it die. Solomon determined she was the true mother of the child.

Jesus began teaching the disciples how to pray in Matthew 6:9-10 by seeking God’s kingdom and will to be done, on earth as it is in heaven. The beginning of wisdom is seeking God in all things.

Holding on to hope in the most difficult of times is one of the trials we all face. One might be reminded of Gandalf’s wise words to the hobbits, that “all we have to decide is what to do with the time given to us.” Or when Gandalf says, “there never was much hope, only a fool’s hope.” It’s hard to have hope when everything is crashing down around us, when our lives are falling apart. One can’t imagine all that Job has been through, or even Bartimaeus—who, as a blind man, would have been forced to beg because he would have been considered unclean and unable to work. But the awe of God is the beginning of wisdom and understanding. Knowing that our God is the God who created the whole universe—this is the beginning of all knowledge. And it gives us hope. The same God who made everything made us, knows us, knows what we have been through, and will see us through, especially the marginalized: the poor, disabled, and disenfranchised. This same God accepts us as we are and loves us. From the beginning to the end, God is still God, and God is still with us.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 34:1, 3-4, 8)

I will bless the Lord at all times;

**God’s praise shall continually be in my mouth.**

O magnify the Lord with me;

**And may we exalt God’s name together.**

When we seek the Lord, God answers us;

**God delivers us from our fears.**

O taste and see that the Lord is good;

**Happy are those who take refuge in God.**

We will bless the Lord at all times;

**We will worship God now and in every moment.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God, we come before You with our brokenness. We have been battered and beaten down by the world. Some of us have been on the margins far too long. Some of us have recently been pushed there and are awakening to how unjust the world is. Some of us have not experienced injustice directly, but we see the brokenness around us: the people who live on the streets, the people without access to health care, the people who face fear of deportation. Some of us have been crying out so long our voice is hoarse; we have nothing left, no one has heard us.   
But we know, O God, the stories of long ago. We remember how Hagar, oppressed and rejected, named you the God Who Sees, and her child God Hears. You are indeed the God Who Hears, the God Who Sees. You are the God Who Knows. And You are the God who brings us together and heals us in our brokenness. May we see You in the faces of those around us. May we hear You in the voices of those crying out. And may we be in solidarity with all on the margins, and work for justice and healing in this world. In the name of Christ, who died as one of the lost and the least, and was raised, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The psalms tell us that God formed us, and knows our inmost parts, our deepest wounds, our darkest thoughts—and loves us beyond all measure. God knows where we hurt, the pain we dare not speak aloud. God is there for us, and God has sent us to be there for each other. Lift up one another. Love one another. Repent where you have gone wrong. When possible, forgive one another. When possible, seek healing and restoration. Our God is good. Our God is eternal. Our God is love. And love will remain with us, through death and life, always. Amen.

Prayer

Wondrous Creator, You made a world that births new life out of destruction. Volcanoes erupt and storms break out. Earthquakes tear apart and tsunamis wash over. But in all the destruction comes restoration. Green shoots burst forth from ash-laden soil. Waves after the storm smooth the sand and restore the coastlines. The ground settles after quakes, and the world continues on. You are the God of Restoration. You are the God of Healing. Help us to heal the earth that we have damaged. Help us to mend the relationships we have broken. Help us to repent and turn back to You, seek forgiveness for where we have gone wrong, and join with You in restoring our world. Help us to remember Your intention for us to be co-creators with You. In the name of Christ, who calls us to be born anew, to become a new creation, we pray. Amen.