Worship Resources for October 29, 2017—Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, Reformation Sunday

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

Narrative Lectionary: Solomon’s Temple, 1 Kings 5:1-5, 8:1-13 (John 2:19-21)

At the top of Mount Nebo, Moses can see all the land promised by God to his ancestors, the land that the people he led with God’s help out of Egypt into the wilderness will inherit. But God tells Moses that he will not cross over. He has come this far, and he can see it, but this is as far as Moses will go. Moses, the great prophet, dies before reaching the promised land. But before Moses died, he laid hands on Joshua, and Joshua is full of the spirit of wisdom. The people mourn the loss of Moses, for there was never another prophet like him. He is the one who saw them safely out of death into life, out of slavery into freedom, who interceded on their behalf.

Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17 declares that time is not the same to God. A thousand years are like yesterday when it is past, the psalmist sings. God made the heavens and the earth, but even before the world was created, God was God. The psalmist asks for God to prosper the work of their hands—may the work we do as human beings, in our short time on this earth, be fruitful. May we be satisfied with the steadfast love of God in our brief time here.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18 speaks of God’s will that we love one another. God through Moses warns the people not to slander one another, not to hate, not to be unjust. Instead, we are called to practice justice, not take revenge, but to love our neighbors as God has called us to do.

Psalm 1 speaks of the faithful being rooted like trees near streams of water. The faithful are rooted in the scriptures, the ordinances and statutes of God. The faithful are watered by God and nourished by the Spirit, and they bear fruit and prosper. The wicked are those who have no roots, who are blown about by the wind. God watches over the ways of the righteous, because the righteous seek God for nourishment.

Paul shares with the church in Thessalonica how he was accused by false teachers, and Paul insists on his innocence by his own actions as witness. Paul and those with him didn’t come for their own personal gain, to be praised or to receive gifts, but rather because they came to preach the Gospel. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they are witnesses of Paul’s ministry, and that it is God who is the one who will judge.

Jesus is tested by the religious leaders in Matthew 22:34-46. He is asked which of the commandments is the greatest, and, like Moses in Leviticus 19, he sums up the commandments into loving God and loving one’s neighbor as one’s self. Jesus further says that all the commandments and law, everything the prophets said, can be summed up under those two commandments. The religious leaders do not have a comeback for this, so Jesus continues and asks them a question about the Messiah. When they answer that he is the son of David, Jesus questions them back by quoting Psalm 110 and inferring that David is talking about the Messiah instead of himself. In this one riddle, Jesus undermines their authority because they can’t answer who David is talking about. Jesus undermines the religious leaders authority because the authority comes from God, not from human authority.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Solomon’s Temple. Solomon intends to carry out his father’s vision for building a temple. David could not do this because he was a king of war, but God allowed Solomon to carry this vision forward. Solomon has the temple built, and the Arc of the Covenant is brought to rest inside the temple. God has come to dwell with the people forever.

In John 2:19-21, Jesus speaks about his body as a temple. The Second Temple, constructed after the exile, is under construction for renovations as Jesus is speaking, but within forty years of Jesus’ death it will be destroyed during the Jewish revolt. John’s gospel, most likely written years after the destruction, has Jesus foreshadow this event, but also speaks to an understanding of God dwelling within him, and later, within us.

What or who is our authority? This a question that Jews and Christians have argued for millennia. On Reformation Sunday, we think to the great reformers like Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and others, who looked back upon Scripture and tradition and our own human experience. We have various answers for this over the years—Scripture alone; Scripture with tradition, experience and reason; God through the priesthood, by the laying on of hands and the movement of the Spirit. But all scripture, as Jesus declares, points back to love. And no matter where we derive our authority, if love isn’t there, then it is not from God. And the love of God is not there without love for one’s neighbor.

Call to Worship

Jesus taught us which commandment is the greatest:

**“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,**

**and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”**

Jesus said this is the greatest, and the second is like the first:

**“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**

All the law and the prophets lead to this:

**That we love God and love one another.**

Worship God, follow Jesus;

**May the Spirit bind us together in love. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, we confess that we have hidden Your commandment to love among other conditions that we have placed, burdens heavy to bear. We insist our neighbors look the right way, act the right way, speak the right way. We have insisted that our neighbors conform to our expectations in order to be worthy of love. Forgive us, for we have not loved as You have loved us. Turn us back to Your ways of unconditional love and acceptance, as You have loved and accepted us. In the name of Christ, who lay down his life for us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s love is unconditional. God’s love is always free. God’s love is always present. Know that you are beloved to God. Know that God’s love is steadfast, and is with you always. Go, and love others, for God loves you. Amen.

Prayer

God Who Leads, we know that we have not reached the promised land. We know that we have not yet seen the fulfillment of all You have spoken to us through the millennia. We know that there is much work to be done for justice. Grant that we may have the vision of Moses, to know that Your kingdom, Your beloved community, is coming. Grant that we might have the courage of the prophets to continue the work of justice even when it seems futile. Grant that we might have the love of Christ, to be willing to lay down our lives for one another. Grant that through all of this, we may be filled with Your hope, that someday, we will see a glimpse, if not behold, Your beloved community on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.