Worship Resources for October 30, 2016—Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Also including resources for All Saints Day

Revised Common Lectionary: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 or Isaiah 1:10-18; Psalm 32:1-7 or Psalm 119:137-144; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10

All Saints Day: Daniel 7:1-3; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

Narrative Lectionary: God’s Care for the Widow, 1 Kings 17:1-24 (Luke 6:24-26)

This passage from Habakkuk (also a choice on October 2nd of this year) is among my personal favorites. The prophet sees only the violence and destruction that has happened due to the leaders’ choices in Israel. However, God speaks a vision of hope through the prophet. Write the vision: make it plain so that a runner may read it. There is still time. There is still hope. Don’t give up, even if all we see in front of us is hopelessness. Beyond what we can see is where God’s vision is taking us.

The prophet Isaiah calls the Israelites the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, invoking the image of destruction of a people who turned away from God, for the people of Isaiah’s time are no different. The people bring offerings and sacrifices to God for festivals that God doesn’t desire. Instead, what God desires is justice, a liberation from oppression, the remembering of the orphans and the widows and their needs among them. The people can get a fresh start with God, if they turn back to God and to God’s ways—not by the act of ritual sacrifice, but by the action of caring for one’s neighbor and their needs.

The psalmist lifts up a personal prayer in Psalm 32:1-7 that is one many of us can resonate with. Historically attributed to David, the psalmist speaks of the gut-wrenching that happens when we sin but do not acknowledge it, and once it is confessed, how liberating that confession can be. The psalmist sings of gratitude for God’s forgiveness, and how intimate God can be when we come before God to confess where we have gone wrong. God is our hiding place, the one who knows us and surrounds us. God envelopes us so that we cannot be harmed.

Psalm 119:137-114 speaks of the just and righteous God who has given us the commandments to live by. God’s promises are true, and the psalmist asks for understanding from God so they may live into God’s ways.

We begin the letter of 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12 from a writer most scholars acknowledge is not Paul (mainly because key parts of this letter contradict 1 Thessalonians), but who gives thanks for the church in Thessalonica whose faith is known, and of whom the writer boasts of. For all the troubles the church has faced, they have remained faithful, and for that the writer gives praise and prays for the name of Jesus to be glorified through them.

Luke 19:1-10 is the story of Zacchaeus, the wealthy chief tax collector who climbs up in a tree in order for Jesus to see him. Tax collectors were despised because they were seen as working for the Roman government, and often extorted money from those they had to collect upon. They were “sinners.” And Jesus tells Zacchaeus he must stay with him because Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus didn’t care about the leaders who were grumbling, but he cared about Zacchaeus, and others who were cast out. And if there was any doubt on Zacchaeus’ character, Zacchaeus lets it be known that his wealth does not possess him—he will give away half to the poor, and if he has extorted or defrauded anyone, he will pay them back four times as much. Because to Zacchaeus it is more important to be extravagant in his goodwill than it is to hoard his riches, and it is important to him to welcome Jesus into his home. Jesus declares that salvation has come to his house, because Zacchaeus doesn’t care what the others think about him, only what Jesus thinks about him, and what Jesus cares about, which is helping others.

For All Saints Day, we read of one of the visions of Daniel, and while using the time of the Babylonian Empire, it was written during the reign of the Greeks, and the vision refers to the Greek rulers in power. But the hope from Daniel’s vision is that the true kingdom belongs to God and the holy ones—those who stay true to God—will inherit and possess the kingdom that is eternal.

Psalm 149 sings praise to God who is not only the Creator but the judge of all nations. The psalmist calls upon the people to praise God who is victorious and just, who will bind up the kings of nations that oppress them, but free the people who are faithful to God.

Ephesians 1:11-23 speaks of the inheritance that the children of God obtain who are faithful to Christ Jesus. Using the language of inheritance—a language that would be familiar to the people and culture of the time—the writer speaks of the promise of eternal life through God. Inheritance is passed from father to son, and at the time of the father’s death. Here, however, the inheritance is passed on to all of God’s children through the resurrection of Jesus, who is above all things.

Luke 6:20-31 is Luke’s account of the Sermon on the Plain, and the Beatitudes. Along with blessings, there are woes. For those who have little, they will receive much, but to those who are full, they will be hungry; those who are rich have received all they will have. How we live in this life matters for eternity; how we live for others matters in how Christ lived (and lives again) for us.

The Narrative Lectionary looks at the prophet Elijah’s revival of the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:1-24. There is a severe famine in the land, and the widow and her son have very little to eat, but they share what they have with Elijah, expecting to run out of food and die, but Elijah promises her that they will not die. But the son becomes ill and he does die, and she wails against Elijah, because he promised her that her son would not die. But Elijah manages through prayer to call upon God to breathe life into the child again, and she believes that Elijah was indeed sent by God.

Jesus challenges the crowd in Luke 6:24-26 who believe that the good news from the prophet Isaiah was for them. Jesus reminds them that God sent the prophet Elijah to the widow of Zarephath in Sidon, not to the widows of Israel. God cares for the outsiders, the marginalized, the poor—and sometimes that good news is not so good for those who have been on the inside, doing the oppressing.

God’s message of Good News through Christ Jesus doesn’t always sound so good. If you are one of the haves, you might have to give up what you have so others who do not may have something. And it is not always about wealth and possessions—tax collectors were often wealthy and were still despised. It is about power and control. If you are willing to give up power and control, remembering God is in power, then it doesn’t matter who has more, as long as everyone has enough. In the time of the prophets, the wealthy elite were more concerned about looking good for others than doing good for God, and could not see the vision of hope after the exile. Jesus speaks of the woes to those who have wealth and power now, for if that is what is most important to them, they are going to be sorely disappointed.

Call to Worship

The world tells us to seek wealth and success;

**Wisdom teaches us to seek God and righteousness.**

The world tells us that what we *have* in this life matters;

**Wisdom teaches us that what we *do* in this life matters.**

The world tells us that everything we have brings us happiness;

**Wisdom teaches us that God’s love through Christ Jesus our Lord**

**brings fulfillment now and throughout eternity.**

Come, worship God, whose power and authority is above all.

**Come, worship God, who sent us Christ to show us the way of eternal life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we confess that we value the world we have made over the earth You created. We place importance on worldly success and wealth, fame and notoriety, rather than on the commandments You have given us: to love our neighbor, to be good stewards of the earth, to worship You first and foremost. Forgive us for continuing to worship the idols of the world. Forgive us for continuing to fall away from the path You have set before us, the path of righteousness and justice. Call us back into Your ways of love, justice, and restoration. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Wisdom calls out to us, turning us back into the way of right-living. Love calls out to us, turning us back to God and to our neighbor. God reaches out to us, pulling us into the embrace of God’s enfolding love, forgiving us as we forgive others. Go, share the good news of God’s wisdom, of God’s grace, of God’s enduring love found in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayer

God of Beauty and Holiness, help us to seek the beauty of Your goodness and mercy in all we do, over the flashy temptations of worldly measures of success and wealth. Remind us of the beauty of Your creation, the holiness of Your love for us, the truth in Your ways of justice, peace, and reconciliation. May we peel back the veils of this world to be authentic, to truly know Your grace and mercy. Amen.

Prayer for All Saints Day

*(This can be read as a prayer, or as a litany. Where there is a pause, you may invite the congregation to say names out loud).*

God of our Ancestors, God of the Living, God of Abraham and Sarah, Rebekah and Isaac, Leah and Rachel and Jacob and all of our mothers and fathers, we gather on this day to remember and give thanks for those who have gone before us.

For our parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, aunts and uncles, all those of our family who are now with God in eternal life, we give thanks. *(pause)*

For our friends and loved ones, co-workers and soldiers, students and neighbors, we give thanks. *(pause)*

For children gone too soon, for young lives lost, for infants and children and hopes of children gone, we mourn, we pray, and we give thanks. *(pause)*

For leaders and librarians, teachers and coaches, for all those who make a difference to others, and who made a difference in our lives, we give thanks. *(pause)*

For those whose lives were ended prematurely, for those who did not receive justice, for those that were victims of crime or of the injustice system, we remember, we give thanks for their lives, and we ask for the courage to continue the work to bring freedom and liberation. *(pause)*

For all those in the faith who taught us, who nurtured and shaped us, who showed us the love of Christ and continue to lead us in the faith, we give thanks. *(pause)*

To God be the glory, and we give thanks for all those we have named, for those whose names remain in our hearts, for all the saints who have shown us the love of Christ in word and deed, in life and in death, we give thanks, and we pray that we might live into the light of God through their witness and example.

In the name of Christ Jesus, who lived for all, who died for all, and who lives again for all, we pray. Amen.

All Saints Day Ideas:

--Tree of Life: have a drawing of a tree without leaves on a piece of poster board, or have a large branch of a tree with no leaves in a vase with water. Cut out leaves on red, yellow, and orange paper, and invite the congregation to write down the names of a saint that they wish to remember. Have them come forward and attach the leaf to the tree.

--Candles: have tea lights available for people to light a candle in memory of someone who has gone before them.

--Web/Weaving of Life: Have each person’s name written on a ribbon and attach each end of the ribbon to a board or poster board. Have other strips of ribbon available for people to write down the name of a loved one that has gone on, and invite them to come forward and weave those names among the names of those present.