Worship Resources for October 4th, 2015—Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Job 1:1, 2:1-10 or Genesis 2:18-24; Psalm 8 or Psalm 26; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:4-12; Mark 10:2-16

Narrative Lectionary: Moses and God’s Name, Exodus 1-2:10, 3:1-15 (Matthew 12:26-27a)

Suggested readings for World Communion Sunday: Proverbs 9:1-6; Mark 14:17-26 or 1 Corinthians 11:17-26, 12:12-26

We begin with Job, another story from the Wisdom literature, a story in which Satan (in Hebrew, hassatan, The Accuser) plays a prominent role as the heavenly prosecuting attorney. God allows Job to experience incredible suffering, to prove that Job will indeed stay faithful and will not curse God, as Satan predicts. Even though Job’s wife calls upon him to curse God, Job refuses to do so, even though he is suffering great loss in his land, in his family, and in his very skin.

Genesis 2:18-24 contains part of the second story of Creation (this was part of the Narrative Lectionary readings a few weeks ago). In this version of Creation, God has made a human being (adam, often translated as man) before making all of the animals (contrast this with the version in chapter 1). God decides that it is not good that adam is alone, and wants to make a helper for adam, but after God creates all the animals, and adam names them all, God recognizes that this is not satisfactory. God creates out of adam a Woman, and it is in that moment that you have men and women, according to this creation story, and the two become one flesh, because the two were once one.

Psalm 8 reminds us that God has set human beings a little lower than the angels, but created in God’s image, we are created to be stewards of God’s creation, to have dominion over creation the way God has dominion over us, because what are we compared to God? God has made us caretakers of the earth. God is majestic and sovereign, and reigns over creation.

Psalm 26 is a plea to God from one who is innocent. The psalmist please for vindication. The psalmist has walked in God’s ways, but in facing their enemies they face their accusations. The psalmist walks in integrity, and is sure of their steps in God and pledges themselves to the worship of God.

From now until Reign of Christ Sunday, our Epistle readings are from Hebrews. The letter of Hebrews explains the role of Jesus the Christ to Jewish followers of Jesus in the first century. The writer quotes from Psalm 8 about the role of human beings in creation, and that while human beings were made a little lower than the angels, the one who was once like us was raised above the angels, and Jesus is the one who brings us to glory by conquering death.

Mark 10:2-16 contains a very difficult passage of Jesus speaking about divorce. We must remember that some of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, including the Pharisees, were trying to trap Jesus. They asked him if it was lawful to divorce, and Jesus says that Moses allowed the writing of a certificate of divorce, but that is not God’s intention. This is a hard passage to preach on and to understand. And while we may know that in Jesus’ day men had more power, and women could easily be thrown out on the street and having nothing if they were divorced, we have to be careful not to dismiss this passage simply as a cultural statement of his time. Jesus believes that what God has brought together, let no one separate. This is an argument against domestic violence and abuse as well, and certainly Jesus would not want someone to stay in a situation where they were a victim. The one who abuses is the one who causes the separation. God’s intention is not separation, but the joining together. In the same way, God’s intention is not to leave out, but to draw in, as Jesus draws in the little children who were being kept out. God’s intention is for us to join together, to be one body.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of Moses, who is named for the action of being drawn out of the water by Pharaoh’s daughter. Moses is a child who is not supposed to live, but does, through the actions of heroic midwives, mothers and daughters, and adoptive others. Moses has been drawn out of the water, and drawn out of the Hebrew people to be not only a survivor, but a leader of the people, and he is drawn to God in the burning bush. The Hebrews, away from their home for so long, have also forgotten the God of their ancestors, and when Moses asks what name he is to tell them, the voice from the burning bush replies, “I AM WHO I AM.” The Hebrew verb “to be” is connected to the name of God given to Moses.

The brief passage from Mark 12 is a reminder that our God, the same God that sent Jesus, is the God of our ancestors, the God of the living. God does not dwell in the past, but the same God is present with us now, and always will be.

For World Communion Sunday, my alternative suggestions begin with Proverbs 9:1-6. If you have been preaching on the Wisdom track of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Revised Common Lectionary, this is a nice alternative. Wisdom, personified as a woman, has mixed her wine and set her table, and invites all to join her at the table to “eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed” (vs. 5). Wisdom is present at the table of God, and is the one who sends us the invitation to walk in God’s ways.

Mark 14:17-26 is Mark’s account of the Last Supper with Jesus, in which Jesus, celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples, in which Jesus gives them the bread and says, “Take, this is my body.” Simply, no eloquent words, just “Take, this is my body.” When he gives them the cup, he says “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” When we read this passage, we often think of the Words of Institution we use at our table in our congregations—what have we added? What meanings have we brought to the table?

The passage from I Corinthians includes two parts: Paul’s instructions for the Lord’s Supper for the church in Corinth, in which the rich were eating all the food and letting others go hungry (among other things—see the first few chapters for more of the church’s issues with division and power). Paul recites the words of Jesus, with his own interpretation (compare to Mark’s version—this is the version many of us here at the table). Paul warns that those who partake must examine themselves—but it is important for us to look at the context of the previous verses, and the issues of the poor and hungry going without, to see that the table is about abundance and having enough, and that all at the table are one body. This is the second part from chapter 12—that we are one body with many members, all with various gifts, and all of us are needed and necessary at the table of Christ.

There are many themes for this Sunday, but the main theme that sticks out for me is that God’s intention for us is not suffering, is not misery, is not division and divorce and separation, but unity, wholeness and healing. The invitation to the Table of Christ is this invitation: to a life of wholeness, unity, belonging, healing, and restoration. It doesn’t mean it is not painful. It doesn’t mean that it is perfect, for we are still human beings. But it means the invitation is open for all, as Wisdom sends out her messengers, as Paul reminds us to be one body, and Christ breaks the bread and pours the wine for all.

Call to Worship

The Holy One is speaking your name:

 **Come, join in the worship of our God.**

The Spirit is moving among us, whispering to you:

 **Come, join in the worship of our God.**

Jesus is calling you to follow him:

 **Come, join the worship of our God.**

Listen and feel and know the voice of God:

 **Join the body of Christ, and may we worship our God together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Oneness, we confess that we are broken, fractured, and scattered. We confess we have sought our own way above Your way. We have excluded others from the table, intentionally and unintentionally. We have, at times, in the name of unity, invited those in power, thereby excluding those who have been oppressed, abused, and marginalized. Forgive us of our intentional and unintentional actions, when we cause harm. May we remember that You call us to the table, You call us to examine ourselves, You call us to seek justice as well as forgiveness. May we be one, by giving up our power and privilege, remembering that our invitation is not more important than others, but rather we must become last of all and servant of all. In the name of Christ, who prayed that we might be one, so we also pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

There is a balm in Gilead, so we sing. There is a hope that our suffering will end. There is a promise that life will endure forever. There is the assurance of forgiveness found in Christ Jesus our Lord. May we know God’s love by loving our neighbor as ourselves. May we seek to serve others, lift up one another, and know the love found in Christ Jesus, by the love our neighbors have for us, and the love we have for all. Amen.

Prayer

Steadfast God, our world is ever-turning, ever-changing. What we know today we did not always know, and what comes tomorrow may completely surprise us. Help us to be open to the movement of Your Spirit in our lives and in our world. May our hearts be open to love, and our minds be open to change. May we ourselves be open to welcome others to Your table, for You are the one who welcomes us. Help us not to look back in fear, but to look forward with hope, knowing that You have caused the world to turn, our planet to revolve around the sun, our solar system to move about the galaxy—so You are always calling us to a new place, a new time, a new point of view. May we be open to your people, and may we be open to You, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.

Suggestions for World Communion Sunday

--Breads of the World—have different breads, such as naan, tortillas, pita bread, challah, brioche, etc. on your Communion table. Have some of each kind available for distribution during communion.

--Invite people to pray the Lord’s prayer in different languages.

--Pray for all of the countries of the world, or pray for each continent

--Light eight candles for the seven continents plus all islands

Litany (before Communion, or can be used as a Call to Worship) for World Communion Sunday

God has created one planet for us to live on;

 **May we be one, as Christ and the Creator are one.**

Autumn has begun in the Northern Hemisphere, and Spring in the Southern Hemisphere;

 **We celebrate the turning of seasons, as one world created by God.**

God has called us to care for creation, and to care for one another;

 **May we love our neighbor as ourselves; may our love be an act of worship.**

On this day, we worship Christ, who invites us to the table to share bread and wine;

 **Come, for all of us are invited.**

**Come, for all will be fed.**

 **Come, for all things are ready.**