Worship Resources for October 6th—Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Lamentations 1:1-6 or 3:19-26, or Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4; Psalm 37:1-9 or Psalm 137; Luke 17:5-10; 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Lamentations begins with the mourning of the destruction of Jerusalem; Zion now lies in ruins and Judah has gone into exile. It is a beautiful, sad poem of grieving, of loss, of what has happened because the leaders would not listen. Jerusalem is often personified as a woman weeping by the prophets, and other nations that Judah had relations with are called her lovers, as the people often turned away from God to follow their gods.

The selection from chapter 3 is also an alternative for the Psalm reading this week, a passage of hope in this short book of grieving after the fall of Jerusalem. The hope of the people is in God, whose love never fails, who will not reject the people forever, who has promised the people will return. The passage assures that God does not “willingly afflict or grieve anyone” (3:33) and we are reminded that it was the consequences of the people’s actions that they were forced out in exile and the city destroyed; but the consequences of loving God is that God will remain faithful forever, and that God does not desire punishment, but restoration.

The reading from Habakkuk will also be repeated on November 3rd in the Revised Common Lectionary as an alternative reading. Habakkuk is known for his views on vision—moving away from the law because the people won’t follow it, and moving instead towards vision. Vision gives us hope. Vision points the way. Vision says to live by faith, that though things are terrible now, God will see the people through if they wait in faith. The selection closes with “the righteous live by their faith.” Living by faith is living with vision, a vision that moves us forward and points us in the right direction. It may take a while, but we will see that God has seen us through.

Psalm 37:1-9 sings of trust in God. If one trusts in God, they commit their life to God and to God’s ways, and God will lead you through life. The psalmist reminds the listeners to remain faithful and to be patient, and not to turn to anger, wrath and revenge—those ways lead to evil, but remaining faithful to God will bring peace.

Psalm 137 sings of the destruction of Jerusalem from the people’s perspective, rather than from the prophet’s in Lamentations. The beginning words are familiar for many since they have been turned into songs in many cultures—the longing for one’s home, though one’s home no longer exists. The last verse, however, is often left out of readings, though it is included this time. The last verse speaks to the very human desire to have revenge, even to kills children and infants. It is a horrible verse, speaking to the horrible desire that we as human beings can have and the actions we are capable of. This psalm is a good contrast to the words of the prophets speaking for God, where revenge talk is minimized and restorative justice is what God desires.

Luke 17:5-10 is a short, somewhat funny passage of an interaction between Jesus and his disciples. I really think Jesus had a good sense of humor that has been lost through time and translation. I don’t think Jesus was literally saying that if you had faith you could tell a tree to uproot and plant itself in the sea. He’s responding in a ridiculous way to a ridiculous question by the disciples. They either have faith or don’t. Nothing Jesus can do can increase their faith, they have to be the ones to trust in Jesus. So Jesus tells this little parable that’s a bit ridiculous about a master and a slave, describing a common scene among the people and that in the class understanding of that day, there is no way a slave would eat at the table. Now, in other places, Jesus might have told this parable differently and talked about the first being last and the slaveowner inviting the slaves to the table, but that wasn’t the point he was trying to make. He was just pointing out the obvious that if they follow Jesus and his ways, that should be enough to trust him and to have faith, just as a slave ought to do in their society of that day.

2 Timothy 1:1-14 begins with encouragement to the reader (most scholars don’t believe this was written by Paul to Timothy but rather a disciple of Paul’s), praising Timothy’s faith, and acknowledgement that grace given by Jesus has been available since “before the ages began” (vs. 9). In other words, this Christ has been in the beginning with God and has been with God throughout time and history, revealed through the person of Jesus who has now risen, and is now being lived out through the gospel that Paul proclaims. Be faithful to Jesus but also to the teaching of Paul, for there are teachers of another gospel out there. The faithful life is not easy, and there is suffering, but God will see us through if we are faithful.

Faithfulness, endurance, patience—these are the themes of walking the faithful life with God. For the people in the prophet’s time, it was to endure in faithfulness through generations in exile. In the time of Jesus, it was for the disciples to find their way to trust in Jesus, because Jesus couldn’t just give them the ability to magically trust and be faithful. For Paul’s day and following, it was for the followers to continue to live in faith by what they had been taught and had witnessed. For us, we are called to be faithful because of our tradition, our teaching, but also still, hope for the New Day, which began long ago and we can read through the prophets, through the Gospels, and through the Epistles: hope that God will continue to do a new thing, and that we will remain faithful to God. For World Communion Sunday, we remember that the Good News has spread throughout the world, and that we are called to remain faithful to God and to the ways of Jesus; to de-escalate from war and increase in faith, to walk in the ways of peace and to seek justice for all.

Call to Worship

Around the world, in all nations, the faithful have gathered for worship

 **We gather in this space to worship You, O God.**

Around the world, speaking in all languages, the faithful come to pray together

 **We lift up our prayers to You, O God.**

Around the world, using tortillas and pita, crackers and bread, the faithful remember Your body that was given to us.

 **We share in the meal of remembrance, O Christ our Savior**

Around the world, we remember our brothers and sisters this World Communion Sunday

 **We worship, we pray, we remember and we celebrate our diversity and our unity in Christ.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we confess that we have not lived in unity. We have allowed the world’s divisions of race and gender to separate us, to see another as inferior. We have judged other believers as unworthy. Forgive our ability to divide into “us against them” so quickly. Forgive our ability to judge others without seeing our own faults so readily. Forgive our ability to divide ourselves and separate ourselves rather than working for unity and justice. Forgive us, turn us back to You, and help us to seek Your ways, for You have remained faithful to us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

There is nothing that can separate you from God’s love. Know that hope will see you through, and God’s steadfast love endures forever. Go and live into God’s love, peace and justice. Amen.

Prayer

Jesus, Savior of the World, on this World Communion Sunday we come to You to celebrate, and to pause, remember, and give Thanks for Your Body and Blood given for us. We participate with our brothers and sisters all around the world, each with our own language and way of remembering that You gave Yourself for us. Until that day when You come in a new way into our world and into our lives, we celebrate Your presence now with us, together as Your body around the world, proclaiming Your death and resurrection together. In your Living name we pray, remember and celebrate. Amen.