Worship Resources for October 6th, 2019—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost, World Communion Sunday

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

Narrative Lectionary: Hear O Israel, Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:4-9 (Mark 12:28-31)

The first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures moves from Jeremiah to the book of Lamentations, historically attributed to Jeremiah. These poems of lament were written during the time of the siege and fall of Jerusalem. “How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!” The author sings of Judah going into exile and how the people suffer for their many transgressions.

The second reading from Lamentations continues the lament, but then turns to a word of hope: “the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.” Great is God’s faithfulness. Even in the midst of destruction and despair, the author finds hope in God, and in the waiting.

Psalm 137, an alternate to the second selection from Lamentations, is a song of lament, from the people taken into exile in Babylon. How they wept for the city of Jerusalem that had fallen! The psalmist sings of being unable to sing God’s song in a foreign land, and yet, they hope to never forget Zion. However, at the end, the psalmist turns to revenge against the enemy Babylon, hoping for the same destruction—including the death of children—to happen to them. It is a psalm that speaks to our very human desire for revenge and punishment.

The prophet Habakkuk also prophesies during the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah, speaking of the violence and judgment of the people. Though the prophet cries out to God to listen, the prophet also sees the wrongdoing of the people around him. However, Habakkuk is given a vision by God, a vision of hope for the end to come. The vision is clear, simple and plain, so a runner could read it passing by. The righteous live by faith, and trust that God will fulfill the vision.

The psalmist sings of trusting in God and not worrying about those who do evil in Psalm 37:1-9. Commit one’s self and way of life to God, and God will grant justice. Do not give in to anger and wrath, for they lead to evil, but those who wait for God will find the desires of their heart.

Paul most likely did not write 2 Timothy. However, these words are of encouragement and thanksgiving for the early believers. God has given them a spirit of power and love, giving them a holy calling, a purpose. The writer encourages them to hold fast to the teaching they have been given, and to trust in the faith and love in Jesus Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus responds to the disciples who ask him to increase their faith in Luke 17:5-10, and I would dare say with a little attitude. Jesus speaks as if they ought to know that faith is not something given to them, but faith comes by doing. If they had faith the size of a mustard seed, they could move mountains. If they would do what they ought to do, they would know God was with them and would trust God. Jesus uses a metaphor of slavery that, though the context of his day would have been acceptable, in today’s world it is horrible. Jesus compares himself to the master who has no obligation to thank the slaves or give the rest. Instead, it is the slaves that ought to be thankful. This is not a metaphor that can be glossed over or ignored. We must understand how images of slavery such as these were used to justify slavery and subjugation of black persons in our history. However, the meaning behind the metaphor is if we want to increase our faith, we have to do what we already ought to be doing, living as faithful people. Sometimes scripture, even the Gospels, even the words of Jesus, use problematic imagery that is difficult to justify using any longer.

The Narrative Lectionary follows the second giving of the covenant and commandments by God through Moses. The Shema in Deuteronomy 6, part of Jewish liturgy, calls the people into worship and remembrance that they are to love the Lord their God with their whole being. The people are to keep the words of God in their hearts, commit them to memory, teach them to their children, remember them when they wake up and when they go to sleep. The words are to be on the doorposts of their homes, bound to their hands and foreheads, outward displays of the inward faithfulness of the people.

When Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest in Mark 12:28-31, Jesus answered with the Shema (he also answered to love one’s neighbor as one’s self, but that begins in verse 32). All listening would have recognized and understood Jesus’ answer of the Shema.

How do we remain faithful when the world is a dumpster fire? How does one find faith when everything around them is falling apart? Yet somehow, we know that not everything will last forever. If we trust in God’s faithfulness, we experience it. But even knowing God is faithful, it is hard to have hope in difficult times. Jesus teaches us that we ought to live faithfully, then we will know God’s faithfulness. Want to increase your faith? Live as you ought to live, do as you ought to do—and you’ll know God is with you. Doesn’t mean it’s easy, though. It’s part of the struggle, to remember to love God always, with our whole being, and keep our focus on God, when the world around us seems to get worse. Even in the midst of destruction, the prophets remember, behold visions, and sing of God’s faithfulness. Instead of focusing on those doing wrongdoing, the psalmist reminds us to stay faithful, and we ourselves will know the faithfulness of God.

For World Communion Sunday, we find our hope at the table, of people around the world gathering together for the meal of remembrance. We remember that there are many who live in exile, who have to sing their songs in a foreign land due to persecution and violence. We find our hope at all the faithful who gather at Christ’s table, the one who gave himself up to state violence, dying as the most vulnerable among us, so that we may all know life through him.

Call to Worship

In faithfulness, we gather to worship our God;

 **In faithfulness, we sing and proclaim Christ is Lord.**

In faithfulness, we share out of our resources.

 **In faithfulness, we pray for one another.**

In faithfulness, we listen for the word of God;

 **In faithfulness, we seek forgiveness and reconciliation.**

For God is faithful, full of steadfast love and mercy,

 **And God calls us in faithfulness as the body of Christ.**

 **May we worship God, and love one another in faithfulness to Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Faithful One, we confess that our faith wavers and falls apart. We confess that at times the world seems to work against us, and at times the world runs us over. We confess our wounds. We confess that at times we unintentionally harm others because of the spiritual and emotional injuries inflicted upon us. Forgive us, and help us to find healing with each other. Grant us Your peace and mercy in our lives. Help us to find hope and to trust in Your faithfulness, that when we fall apart, we will be put back together into something new; for You are our God, and make all things new, including us. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Lamentations 3:22-23)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; God’s mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. Great is the faithfulness of God, whose mercies never end. May you know God’s mercy and steadfast love in your life. May you know forgiveness, healing and hope. May you share that love, grace, and mercy with one another, and the peace of God will be with you, now and always. Amen.

Prayer

Eternal One, You have prepared a table before us, and have invited us in Your wisdom to take our place. There is room enough for all at the table, a gracious feast that nourishes and satisfies, in the simple elements of bread and wine. On this day, we remember our siblings in faith around the world, gathered together with their own breads and own fruit of the vine, to remember, as Christ called us to do this in remembrance of him. We remember our brother Jesus, who gave his body and his blood, and calls us into the act of giving of our selves in love and service to others, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. We also remember the communion of saints, those that have come before us at this table, and rejoice at the heavenly banquet, for you are our God, the Eternal One, who unites us all through Jesus Christ. In life, death, and in all eternity, we feast together and pray in Christ’s name. Amen.