Worship Resources for October 7, 2012—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; Mark 10:2-16; Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

Our Wisdom thread in the Old Testament readings leads us through the book of Job for the month of October. The lectionary skips the first time God allows Satan to enter into Job’s life and Job’s children die, along with all of his herds of animals, but we read the second time, when Job’s health deteriorates. Job is our version of a very old myth, in which God and Satan make a bet to see if Job will stay faithful to God (and Satan in the book of Job is not the harbinger of all evil, but merely the Accuser, the one who makes sure things are as they should be, in which there is no gray area—either you are faithful to God or you are not, and Satan wants to prove to God that no one is completely, 100% faithful, that all will fail God and will curse God). We will continue to read on this month about Job, about his questioning of God’s will, why bad things happen to good people, and other such questions that do get at the heart of our faith—and are still hard to answer.

Our second thread of the Old Testament in the Lectionary has been from the prophetic tradition; today, however, it harkens back to Genesis and the creation of humanity. We were often taught as children that God created Adam and then created Eve from Adam, but a closer reading of the Hebrew shows us that adam is the word for human being—in other words, the human being was made, but the human being was alone, so God created another being, and from one came two—male and female—and God created us not to be alone.

This is an important reading at this time. In this election season, with only four weeks after this Sunday, four states are voting on issues of marriage equality, and many who call “traditional marriage” as between one man and one woman will cite this passage. However, we know from our Bible that throughout the Old Testament there are different variations of “traditional marriage”—Abraham marries Sarah but has a child through the slave Hagar; both Jacob and Esau have multiple wives and Jacob has children through his wives’ servants; David and Solomon have multiple wives and concubines; and the list goes on and on.

What we can learn from this reading in Genesis, however, is that God’s desire is for us not to be alone—that God created two out of one so that they would become one again, and this relationship is mutual, equal. Marriage has changed over 3500 years; so has our understanding of what is important in marriage, such as love and mutual respect; rarely in Western society is it part of a property exchange, as it was in Biblical days. If we believe love to be most important in a marriage (which it clearly was not in the Bible), then our understanding of marriage, our definition, has changed.

Psalm 8 celebrates our humanity reflecting the image of God’s Divinity. We are created in the image of God. Paired with the reading from Genesis, and in light of Genesis 1:22-27, we understand the image of God is more fully reflected when we are in relationship with one another, as we were created to be, for God said “Let *us* make humankind in our image.” Our created nature is to care for the earth’s creatures as God cares for us, to have dominion in the way God has dominion.

Psalm 26 is a song seeking justice. Paired with the reading from Job, we understand the psalmist’s cry: why have bad things happened when one has been innocent? We often cry out to God when the world is unjust to us, and we seek God’s deliverance. Sometimes we seek God’s wrath and vindication—we want to be proven right and others proven wrong—but God’s justice is restorative, not retributive. Justice is for both sides. Justice is an evening out—the high places brought low and the rough places made a plain, as the prophet Isaiah said. The psalmist continues to be just and to do right, even when others are doing wrong against him/her, and we are called to do the same.

Mark 10:2-16 complements the Genesis passage. These are some of the hard sayings of Jesus. Even Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 seems a little easier going than Jesus. But what we learn from this passage is that God’s intention for us is whole relationships, not brokenness. And all too often, our society allows relationships to fall apart and die for very petty reasons (take the slew of celebrity breakups, or the 72 day marriage of a certain famous family). There are very real reasons that divorce is necessary: abuse, neglect, and addictions, to name a few. And the truth of the matter is we can never judge another on what may necessitate a divorce. Sometimes, bad things just happen. People fall out of love. Things happen beyond our control. Like Job, we may be judged by others when we did nothing wrong. This is a hard teaching of Jesus, but Jesus is pointing to what God desires, not what we desire. Nonetheless, we all know that we as human beings fall short, and this is one of the teachings we still strive to live in to, but know that it is not always possible.

In the second part of the passage, Jesus is welcoming in the children, and reminds the disciples that they must receive the kingdom of God like a child. As we read from 9:30-37 recently, we are reminded again that children are powerless. The disciples have even spoken sternly to the parents who were bringing their children, shaming them, using their power to keep out the powerless, but Christ welcomes them right into the heart of the gathering. Jesus continues to welcome in the powerless, the marginalized and the oppressed right into the heart of our faith, the heart of our community. And Jesus welcomes in those of us who are imperfect, who are broken, who are divorced, who are remarried, and who are hurt.

In October, we will also be reading from Hebrews for the month. We are introduced to this letter, a reminder of Psalm 12, that Jesus is part of God’s created order from the beginning, and Jesus is a continuation of God’s promises, and God’s revelation to the world. In this passage, we are reminded of Jesus’ humanity, that Jesus gave up power to become one of us, and not just one of us, but among the least of us. Jesus came in solidarity to be with humanity, and in solidarity Jesus lived with the poor and the outcasts and those labeled as sinners. Jesus is not ashamed (vs. 11) to call those that suffer brothers and sisters—whether they suffer because of the faith, or because of the world—Jesus called his brothers and sisters those who sat at the table with him, often the outcasts of society.

We are confronted with the hard sayings of Jesus, but also the understanding that our world is full of brokenness. God intended us to be in mutual relationship with each other, caring for the earth together; but instead, we break and distort relationships, we disregard the earth and abuse the world’s resources, and we judge others and keep out the powerless. Christ calls us to stop judging, to stop keeping others out, to welcome each other in like a child, to remember that only in God are we made whole again.

As we prepare for this election season—and today, as we prepare for World Communion Sunday—we are reminded that in Christ we are made whole, but we all are broken. We all need healing, forgiveness, and restoration. We ought to stop judging others, leaping to conclusions about why people are the way they are—and instead welcome, embrace, and forgive each other, as Christ does so to us.

Call to Worship (adapted from Revelation 7:9-10; Acts 10:34-35; and Mark 9:37):

From every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, they cry out in a loud voice:

 **Salvation belongs to our God, and to the Lamb!**

We truly understand that God shows no partiality,

 **In every nation anyone who is in awe of God and does what is right is accepted by God.**

Whoever welcomes one such child in Christ’s name welcomes Christ;

 **And whoever welcomes others welcomes our Creator who sent us Jesus.**

Come, let us gather in worship, in prayer, meditation and song;

 **Come, let us celebrate our God who created all and welcomes all!**

Prayer of Confession/Prayer of Brokenness:

Almighty God, we confess that we judge others and we play favorites. We are accepting of those who are accepting, but we reject those who seem narrow-minded and closed off to the world. We want to accept everyone except *those* people. We forget that all of us are made in Your image, and that all of us have sinned and fall short. Forgive us for our pride and arrogance. Forgive us for our selfishness and self-centeredness. Forgive us when we judge and despise others, even when we claim that judging others is wrong. Turn us back to Your path, turn us back to Your love, and guide us in ways to restore and heal relationships. In the name of Jesus, who emptied his pride to the point of dying on the cross, we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon (Romans 8:38-39):

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayer:

Holy God, we come to You broken and in need of wholeness. All of us have relationships that have faltered over time. All of us have wounds that remain hidden in our hearts. The world has distorted the goodness You created. We have allowed for friendships to end and relationships to break up. Sometimes, this has been necessary for our own self, and sometimes it has happened outside of our control. Great Creator, we do not know why these things happen, but we know that You created us in Your image. May we strive to live more fully into that image, to do what we can to bring healing and wholeness in our lives and the lives around us. In the name of Jesus, who lived for us, who died for us, and lives again, we give all of our hope. Amen.

Prayer for World Communion Sunday (leading into the Lord’s prayer in different languages):

*(Invite the congregation beforehand to pray the Lord’s prayer in any language they choose. If your congregation is primarily English-speaking, invite them to pray the words of the prayer that they may have learned from their own backgrounds—using debts and debtors, trespasses, sins, etc.—so that there is a diversity of words, but the same spirit of prayer)*

God of all nations, we give You thanks that we are all made in Your image, with such rich diversity. On this day we are in solidarity with the faithful around the world. As we break bread together, we remember that we are still one body in You, even though we have different languages, cultures and traditions, different ways of worship, praying and praising. In solidarity we drink the cup together of hope, of new life, knowing that Your will is for Your people to be one body. We are one body, but we are not the same—it is through the gift of diversity that we are able to be Your body. We thank You and praise You for making us all who we are, individually and collectively. We each celebrate our own ancestry, culture and ethnicity, and we pray to You now as You taught us…