Worship Resources for October 9th, 2016—Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 or 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c; Psalm 66:1-12 or Psalm 111; 2 Timothy 2:8-14; Luke 17:11-19

Narrative Lectionary: Golden Calf, Exodus 32:1-14 (Luke 23:34)

The prophet Jeremiah declares to the people in Exile to settle where they have landed, seek the welfare of the city they live in, plant gardens and build houses. These are not the words a people who have been sieged necessarily want to hear. They may want a warrior to rise up and lead them back to their homeland; instead, God has a different future in mind for them. Until the time when the people can return, they are to find peace where they are, where they have landed, and to build a new home there.

The commander of the army of the king of Aram, named Naaman, discovers that it is sometimes the simple acts of faith that can bring healing in 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c (this passage was a choice in the first track for the Hebrew Scriptures this season on July 3rd). Naaman is sent all the way to Elisha of Israel, only to learn that he has to wash seven times in the Jordan to be made clean. Naaman is angry, that this is all he has to do, when his servants remind him if it had been much more complicated he would have tried to do it, so why not something so simple?

Psalm 66:1-12 is a song of praise to God who delivers the people. The psalmist recalls the exodus of the people from Egypt, the passage safely on dry land through the sea. Though the people continue to endure trials and have at times been oppressed, God continues to see them through to safety, and the psalmist praises God who has kept them among the living.

Psalm 111 is a song of praise to God for all God’s wonderful works. God is trustworthy and faithful, and God’s covenant endures forever. The psalm ends with the familiar refrain in the wisdom literature of the Bible, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Being in awe of God is where we ought to begin, where we grow in insight, wisdom, and knowledge.

The writer of 2 Timothy 2:8-14 urges the believers to endure, even in the midst of hardship, suffering, and persecution. There has been infighting among the early followers, and the writer strives to make known the true word of God through Jesus Christ is a word that liberates and frees, for the word of God cannot be chained. The early followers ought to be faithful, because Christ will always be faithful, and not allow infighting and arguing to separate them. There are greater challenges that they face.

Luke 17:11-19 is the story of the faithful Samaritan. Jesus heals ten lepers on his way to Galilee, but none of the others return to thank him. Only the Samaritan—the foreigner, the one who would be outcast and despised by others—returns to Jesus to thank him. To be clear, Jesus didn’t tell them to come back—he told them to go and show themselves to the priests so they would be declared clean—but this one, this Samaritan, remembers to come back, praising God, and thanking Jesus. He doesn’t need to show himself to the priest, for now Jesus says, “Your faith has made you well.”

The Narrative Lectionary continues through these early stories of the Bible with The Golden Calf. But the story perhaps is not so much that the people fell away from God so easily and demanded that Aaron make them a god, an idol to worship; rather, the real story is that God changed their mind. Yes, God was ready to wipe out the people and make a new nation out of Moses, out of anger and wrath. But Moses talks God down, and God does not wipe the people out. God changes their mind.

Luke 23:34 is the quotation of Jesus saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing!” In this moment, Jesus is pleading for God to set aside judgment. Forgiveness is about setting aside judgment, even if the person should have known what they were doing. Moses intervenes on behalf of the people when they make the Golden Calf, and Jesus intervenes upon his own death on the cross.

It is sometimes the little things in our faith journey that matter most: the moment of forgiveness instead of judgment; the moment we let something go instead of letting it get under our skin. The moment when we try something new even when it seems ridiculous. The moment when we make the best of a bad situation and try to live on. The moment when we remember to say “Thank you” for something we have taken for granted. Sometimes the little things can make the world of difference.

Call to Worship

Let go of the things that hold you back;

 **May we be open to the movement of God’s Spirit.**

Trust in God’s love for you,

 **For God’s love sets us free in Christ Jesus.**

Be ready, for God is doing something new in us;

 **Be prepared, for God is continuing to surprise us.**

Know Jesus, and know The Way of Christ;

 **For God brings life out of death, and turns the world upside down!**

Come, join your hearts in worship:

 **Come, let us lift our open hearts in praise to God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, You raised Jesus from the dead, but we are still stuck in our ways and stuck in the grave. We are stubborn fools who want things to remain as we have always known them, but You created a world that spins and revolves and is ever changing. Even when we have turned away from You and You were angry with us, Your love for us continued to grow and You gave us another chance. Forgive us for refusing to learn, to trust, and to change, and call us forth into the new life You have prepared for us. Help us to let go. Help us to trust You. Help us to journey forward in faith. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s steadfast love endures forever, never ceasing, and renews every dawn. Every moment is a fresh start with God. Know that you are beloved and precious to God. Live into the knowledge of God’s love by turning to God’s ways of love, justice and mercy, and extending that love and forgiveness to others. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Universe and the particle, God who has knit everything together in this web of life, and the motion of galaxies, we are in awe and wonder of Your works, and the finite working You are doing in each of us. May we be open to Your movement, to help us to grow and change. Push and nudge us to reach higher, dig deeper, stretch further. Open our hearts and minds to understand Your working in our universe, in this planet You have shared with us. Call us to be better stewards of all You have given us: our bodies, our minds, our world, so that we may grow in our understanding of creation and You, our Maker, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Amen.