Worship Resources for Sunday, November 1st—Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints Day

Revised Common Lectionary: Ruth 1:1-18 or Deuteronomy 6:1-9 or Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 24 or Psalm 119:1-8 or Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:11-14 or Revelation 21:1-6a; Mark 12:28-34 or John 11:32-34

Narrative Lectionary: Kingdom Divided, 1 Kings 12:1-17, 25-29 (Mark 10:42-45)

I have included the options for All Saints Day in with the selections for the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost.

Our first selection is from Ruth, a Moabite woman, an outsider, who marries into an Israelite family, and after her husband dies, she refuses to return to the family of her origin, but clings herself to Naomi and her new family with her famous vows: “Where you go, I will go, where you stay, I will stay, your people will be my people, and your God, my God.” This commitment to her late husband and his family, and in particular her mother-in-law Naomi is also a commitment to their religion, to their God. The story of Ruth shows that God’s covenant and love are beyond the borders that we imagine and put in place. Whereas in other parts of the Bible there are restrictions on marrying outside of Israel, especially with Moab, Ruth shows that there are always exceptions to the rule, and that most often, the rules are imposed by us, not by God.

In Deuteronomy 6, the people are reminded to uphold the law, the ordinances and statutes that they have been given. They are called to bind them to their hands, to fix them on their foreheads, to write them on the doorposts and the gates—in other words, to remember them at all times, when coming and going, when working and giving and sharing, and when pondering and meditating, to always remember that the Lord is God, the Lord Alone, and they are to love God with their whole being.

Isaiah 25:6-9 is a vision of the heavenly banquet by the prophet Isaiah, in which death is destroyed, tears are wiped away, and the people rejoice with God forever. All peoples are present at this banquet of rich food and well-aged wines, a feast of rejoicing in God’s salvation.

Psalm 24 speaks of the hill or mountain of the Lord (referenced in the Isaiah 25 passage). In those days, gods were thought to dwell in the mountains above the clouds (hence Moses ascending the mountain to talk to God). God is the God of all creation—who is worthy to see God? Those who follow God’s ways. And not only that—God will come to you! God will enter your gates and doors and be present with you. God is described as the “King of Glory” who bestows blessings, and what a blessing it is to be in God’s presence!

Psalm 119:1-8 sings of those who follow God’s ways, who keep the decrees of God in their heart—they are happy. The ones who follow what God commands find blessings in their lives. The psalmist sings of their desire to please God and to follow God’s ways, and praises God for learning God’s ordinances and statutes.

Psalm 146 sings praise to God, the one we should put our trust in. Earthly princes will fail us, but God is the one who reigns forever. God is the one who frees the prisoners and hears the cries of the oppressed. God is the God of justice. God, who created the universe, also hears the cries of the lost and the least—the poor, the widow and the orphans, and will bring them justice.

Hebrews 9:11-14 concludes that Jesus, as both the high priest and ultimate sacrifice, is able to enter the dwelling place of God—not the temple made by human hands, but heaven itself—and purifies all for eternity. Each animal sacrifice was for the atonement of sins by a priest interceding on behalf of the people, but Christ does it once, for all, and ends the need for sacrifice.

Revelation 21:1-6a is a vision of the new heaven and new earth, similar to the vision of Isaiah, where there is no more weeping and mourning. Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. God makes all things new again. Death becomes eternal life.

Jesus declares the greatest commandment in Mark 12:28-34. In Matthew and Luke, it appears that the scribes and others were trying to trap Jesus; in Mark’s version, it seems more like a genuine question among scribes arguing amongst themselves. When Jesus answers with both the declaration of God as one, to love God with one’s whole being, and to love one’s neighbor as one’s self, the scribe tells Jesus, “You are right, Teacher.” Jesus was not the first to talk about loving one’s neighbor as a commandment—but this scribe sees Jesus answering the question well, and responds in a way that Jesus declares, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

John 11:32-44 contains the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Both Martha and Mary are grieving the loss of their brother, but it is Mary’s weeping that also causes Jesus to grieve. Even Jesus mourns Lazarus’ death and is moved to tears at the loss the sisters feel. When Jesus calls Lazarus to come out of the tomb, he also tells the people to “unbind him, and let him go.”

The Narrative Lectionary tells the story of the Kingdom Divided, when Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, and Solomon’s former official Jeroboam, become rival kings. At first Rehoboam is made king in Shechem, but returns to Jerusalem to reign while Jeroboam is in Egypt. Rehoboam refuses to listen to the wisdom of his father or his father’s elders, which encourage him to lead by serving; instead, he listens to his peers who feel he should go for more power and control. The northern tribes leave Rehoboam, leaving Judah alone to follow Rehoboam. Jeroboam will later become the king of Israel in the north, creating calves of gold for the people to follow. Neither kingdom is following the wisdom of Solomon or the ways of their God.

Mark 10:42-45 is Jesus’ declaration that whoever wishes to become the greatest must become last of all and servant of all, rather than lording power over one another. Jesus leads by example, serving those in need, and serving his own disciples, rather than him being served by them.

On All Saints Day, we remember those who have gone before us in the faith; we remember their legacy and their witness. We remember that death does not have the final word, and that the most important thing we can do, as Jesus declares, is to love one another and to serve one another. Love never ends; love never dies. The most important thing we can do now is to love one another in this lifetime, and to let those around us know they are loved. That love will carry us on when our loved ones are gone, until we are at home with our God at last, at the great banquet table, where there will be no more weeping and mourning.

Call to Worship

There will be a new heaven and a new earth;

**We are waiting for the reign of God.**

The home of God will be among us;

**We are preparing for the reign of God.**

God will wipe away every tear from our eye;

**We are expecting the reign of God.**

Death will be no more! Crying and pain and sorrow will be no more!

**Until that day comes, we are waiting, preparing, and expecting the reign of God to come.**

We gather our hearts to worship our God, who is eternal, and whose love knows no end.

**Amen and Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come to You knowing that we have not done our best, loved our best, hoped our best. We have given up, we have broken up, and we have failed to do what we ought to have done. We have not served one another, but have served ourselves first. We have not loved one another as we love ourselves. We have failed to be an example as the saints before us; we have failed to witness to Your love in this lifetime. Forgive us. Call us back to Your ways. Open our hearts to our neighbors, to the strangers in the world around us, to all of Your children, and may we remember we are one of them. In the name of Christ, who served us all, giving himself up for us in the greatest act of love imaginable, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

There will be a new heaven and a new earth. There will be a new day dawning. There will be light and love and hope, if we believe it, and live it. Know that you are loved and forgiven in Christ Jesus our Lord, and are called to share that love and forgiveness with the world. Live into the hope of Christ. Amen.

Prayer

Alpha and Omega, A to Z, Beginning and Ending, You have given us the fullness of life. We have taken it away from others, we have denied it to those except the wealthy and powerful, and we have even snatched it away from the earth, from Your creatures. Call us into the work of reconciliation and restoration: to give up power and privilege, to replant and cultivate, to bring forth new life. Call us into the difficult work of anti-racism, to dismantle white supremacy and privilege, poverty and hunger. May we look to the saints of the past who worked for Your justice here on earth, and may we be inspired and encouraged by their work to help participate in Your reign here on earth as it is in heaven. Challenge us, shape us, and restore us into Your created intention: caretakers of the earth, neighbors of one another, all of us Your children. To our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we offer our prayers, our praise and our thanksgiving. Amen.

Ideas for All Saints Day:

--Have a candle-lighting station for everyone to light a candle in honor/memory of a loved one who has passed on.

--Have an easel with post-it notes for people to write the names of loved ones who have passed on. Bonus: draw a tree on a poster board and make the post-it notes leaf-shaped, to be a Tree of Eternal Life.

--Have a moment during prayer to speak aloud the names of loved ones who have passed on.

--Have people name their favorite saints of the faith—people who have inspired them, living or dead, in their faith life with Christ.