Worship Resources for November 11th, 2018—Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Veterans Day (U.S.)

Revised Common Lectionary: Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 and Psalm 127; 1 Kings 17:8-16 and Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

Narrative Lectionary: Micah, (1:3-5); 5:2-5a; 6:6-8 (Matthew 9:13)

Our first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures through the season after Pentecost began with the rise of the kings of Israel for the first half of the season. The second half of the season moved from King Solomon into wisdom literature and writing. Having come full circle, Ruth takes us back to the ancestors of David. In this second part of readings from Ruth, her mother-in-law Naomi helps arrange for Ruth to marry Boaz, securing her future. Ruth and Boaz become the great-grandparents of David, and Naomi has a new family, after losing her husband and sons.

Psalm 127 is a song celebrating home and family, as understood in ancient Israel. In order to protect one’s land and inheritance, one needed to have sons, and the psalmist blesses those who are gifted with a large number of sons, who can protect their inheritance and keep the family safe. This is a blessing from God, and only by relying on God will one have security—worrying will not keep one safe.

The prophet Elijah is sent by God to be fed by a widow at Zarephath, in 1 Kings 17:8-16. But upon arriving and asking her for water and food, she tells him she is unable to feed him, that she only has a little meal left and some oil, and she’s going to make a last cake with it for her and her son; afterward, they will die, for there is a great famine and there is nothing left. Elijah tells her not to be afraid, but to go ahead and make a little cake for Elijah first, and then the jar and meal will not run out—not until it rains again on the earth. She does as Elijah tells her, and she and her son and her household were able to eat for many days until the drought ended.

Psalm 146 (also a lectionary choice last week) sings praise to God who made heaven and earth. The psalmist warns not to put one’s trust in earthly princes, because God is the one who remembers the poor. God executes justice on behalf of the oppressed and lets the prisoners free. God gives food to the hungry, watches over the strangers and the most vulnerable. God is the one who reigns forever, over all generations.

The Epistle reading continues in Hebrews, with 9:24-28. The high priest had to enter the sanctuary every year to offer the sacrifice to atone for sins. The writer declares that Jesus, upon entering the heavenly sanctuary once, and by becoming the sacrifice, has removed sin forever. Christ’s death and resurrection has put an end to the sacrificial system in Christian understanding.

Jesus makes observations about those who flaunt their wealth and power and those who live out their faith in Matthew 12:38-44. When he is teaching the disciples in this passage, he is in Jerusalem and he is observing those in power under the Roman rule, especially the scribes in this context. He is seeing how they use their power and privilege to take what they want and to look good in front of others. In contrast, he sees a poor widow put in the treasury all that she has to live on while others put in large sums, and he points her out to his disciples as an example of how to live.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the prophet Micah. Micah began prophesying during the fall of Samaria, and was a contemporary of first Isaiah and Hosea. He saw the worship of God twisted to benefit the rich, and the people’s leaders failing them. Micah, however, sees hope for the future, prophesying a new king who will come like David did—not from the noble elite, but from one of the lowly families, from among the shepherds. He will be a king who will lead them in the way of peace. Finally, the prophet speaks of right worship: it isn’t about sacrifices and festivals that the noble elite are spending their wealth on, but about doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God.

In Matthew 9:13, when Jesus was questioned by some of the religious leaders about who he and his disciples ate with, (for they were eating with tax collectors and other sinners), Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea (a contemporary of Micah’s) back at them: that God desires mercy and not sacrifice.

How do we live out our faith? Are we people of scarcity or abundance? If we live in fear, we live in the scarcity mindset, that there won’t be enough for us if we share with others. If we live in hope, we know that even if we do not have much, God will continue to provide. Living in hope, in abundance, doesn’t mean God magically makes money or food appear. It means we know that God will provide and sometimes God provides through the hands of others. Sometimes we have to ask for help; sometimes we have to accept help. What it means is that we know that all things are God’s. Living in hope, living in the abundance mindset, makes it so our attachment is not on the physical things of this world, but our attachment is on God, knowing that God works through all things. This is right living, right worship.

Call to Worship

God is the Creator of All, the Provider, the Sustainer;

 **Come, worship God, who made heaven and earth.**

God is the Great Shepherd, the one who cares for the flock;

 **Come, worship God, who cares for each one of us and calls us by name.**

God is the Gardener, the one who knows the bulbs deep in the earth;

 **Come, worship God, who is creating all things new again.**

Come, worship our God, the Giver of all Good Gifts;

 **Come, worship God, who leads us into life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Abundance, we confess that at times we are afraid of losing everything. We store and hoard, afraid of running out. We hide and conceal, afraid that others will take everything and there will be nothing left. We live out of fear, O God, instead of love and hope. Guide us away from the fears that bring divisions between us and our neighbors. Remind us, O God, of Your bounty and grace. Remind us, O God, that You gave us this world, and that we are all on this planet together. Remind us, O God, that all things come from You, and all belongs to You, so there is always enough. Call us into the ways of Your abundant life and love. In the name of Jesus, who gave up everything for us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Our God is a God of restoration: of healing, mending, and binding up the broken-hearted. Come to God, and know that God is already with you. Let go of your fears, and cling to God’s love, which is always here for you. For God loves you so much that God sent the Son, and the Son is with us, always, through life, death, and beyond. God’s love is always with you. Amen.

Prayer

God of all times, of all seasons, we seek Your wisdom for our daily lives. Help us to let go of worry. Guide us in ways of living that share Your abundance with all the earth. Keep us to Your ways of righteousness, so that we might work for justice and live in peace with all, including the earth You have given us. Help us to worship You in every moment, by living in gratitude, sharing what You have entrusted to us, and cultivating a way of life that brings healing and hope to the world. In Your name we pray. Amen.