Worship Resources for November 17th, 2019—Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 65:17-25 and Isaiah 12; Malachi 4:1-2a and Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; Luke 21:5-19

Narrative Lectionary: Isaiah’s Vineyard Song, Isaiah 5:1-7; 11:1-5 (Mark 12:1-3)

The prophet’s vision of a new heaven and new earth come after the return from exile in Isaiah 65:17-25. The prophet has seen the promises of God fulfilled, the people returning home, but also returning to their old ways. Now, Isaiah has a vision of God making all things new, where there is no more violence, no more exile, no more sorrow and no more early death. God will rejoice in Jerusalem, and the people will be a delight.

The psalm found in Isaiah 12 is from the time of First Isaiah, before the first exile to Assyria. This is a song of praise for God who has turned to the people, whose anger is gone and in whom the people find salvation. The psalmist calls upon the people to make known what God has done for them, for God is with them.

This short passage from the prophet Malachi speaks of the day of the Lord, when the Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. The day is coming and the fire that purifies will burn all evil, so that there is neither root or branch left, nothing that can grow evil again.

Psalm 98 is a song of praise for victory (and was an alternate selection in last week’s readings). God has shown faithfulness to the people, and the psalmist calls upon the congregation to praise God, but also calls upon the whole earth, all of creation, to join in this song. God has come to judge the earth, and will judge the people with equity.

The writer of 2 Thessalonians (most likely not Paul) warns against false teachings and those who gossip and are busybodies without doing the work of the Gospel. The writer encourages the receivers of this letter to continue to do what is right, and to do the work of the Gospel. They warn against those who assumed their salvation was already at hand and there was nothing more to do be done, and therefore lived off the generosity of others.

As we near the end of this season after Pentecost, we read Jesus’ words to the disciples of what will happen to them Luke 21:5-19. Jesus foretells the temple’s destruction, and warns against false teachers, those who will claim to be Jesus returning, those who say that the end is near. Jesus warns not to follow them, but to know that destruction and terrible times are coming. There will be war and persecution, but the followers of Jesus will endure. Jesus will give them the words to say when their time has come, and they will remain firm in the faith until the end.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to the prophet Isaiah and the parable of the vineyard in 5:1-7, and the roots of hope in 11:1-5. God speaks through the prophet, speaking of Israel and Judah like a vineyard that was planted carefully, but wild grapes grew instead. The vineyard keeper will now break down the wall and remove the hedge that protected it, and it will become overgrown. Because God had expectations for the people, to grow in health, but they chose violence and injustice. However, in chapter 11, the prophet speaks a word of hope. Out of the ruins of the forest, a shoot shall grow from the stump. A branch shall sprout from the roots of the line of Jesse, of David’s father, and a new king will come to lead the people. One who will judge with equity, who will care for the poor, who will lead in righteousness and faithfulness.

Mark 12:1-3 contains the beginning of Jesus’ parable of the vineyard, in which a landowner leased the vineyard to tenants and went away, but when the landowner sent a messenger to collect his share of the harvest from the vineyard, the tenants beat the messenger of the landowner and sent him away.

As we near the end of the liturgical year, we focus on the reign of Christ. We await Christ’s return in our world and lives in a new way. We are not swayed by the stories of war and destruction, for they have been part of our stories for a long time. Instead, we are swayed by signs of hope, stories of faithfulness. We know that God hears our prayers, our cries for justice. And we know the time will come when God will make a new heaven and a new earth, when God will restore what has been taken from the oppressed and marginalized. God’s justice is restorative. It is not easy, and it is painful for those who have privilege, but God’s justice restores God’s intention for creation and for all of us—that we might all have abundant life. To those who have, it is painful to give up, but to those who have gone without, it is good new worth rejoicing about.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 12:2-5)

God is indeed our salvation;

**We will trust and not be afraid, for God is our strength and might.**

We will draw water with joy from the wells of salvation,

**And we will say, “Give thanks to the Lord, call upon God’s name,**

Proclaim God’s deeds among the nations,

**Declare that God’s name is exalted.”**

Sing to the Lord, who has done glorious things,

**Proclaim God’s name throughout the whole earth.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, You are our judge. You are the one who knows who we are, what we are capable of, and what we have done. Forgive us where we have fallen short. Forgive us when we have not lived into Your ways of justice and mercy. Forgive us when we have fallen into the ways of the world that prop up systems of injustice. Forgive us when we unconsciously participate in in systemic sin, that destroys Your creation, harms people who are marginalized, and removes the basic human rights and dignity of others. Call us into repentance and reparation. Call us into accountability for our ways. Lead us into the paths of healing and restoration. Help us to seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphans and others who are on the margins, and to plead for those who are in need. Remind us to participate in our civic government to make changes here and now, for the work we do for others is eternal work, O God. It is the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Almighty God, lead us in right paths, for Your name’s sake. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The prophets always spoke a word of hope to the people, and there is a word of hope for you: God loves you. No matter what you have done, no matter what you haven’t, God loves you. God desires for you an abundant life, and an abundant life is only possible when we love one another, for by loving one another, we love God. Know first that you are loved. Now go, love one another, forgive one another, and live for one another, for by doing so, you live for Christ. Your sins are forgiven. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Master Artist, You are making all things new, a new heaven and a new earth. You are crafting up something right now. The knitting needles are at hand, the glue is being poured. You are working something new in our hearts. You are mixing something new out of our broken lives. The potter’s wheel is whirling, ready. You call to us to join You in the creative work. From the brokenness, You are making something new. From the unraveling, You will knit again. From the fading and falling apart, You will restore. We are made in Your image, Master Artist, Creator, and we have Your creative Spirit working in us. May we make our lives anew, loving one another, and create the beloved community here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.