Worship Resources for November 18th—Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Thanksgiving Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Samuel 1:4-20 or 1 Samuel 2:1-10 or Daniel 12:1-3 or Joel 2:21-27

Psalm 16 or Psalm 126; Matthew 6:25-33 or Mark 13:1-8; 1 Timothy 2:1-7 or Hebrews 10:11-25

We have quite a few choices for this Sunday, as Thanksgiving in the United States falls this week. So this will be a longer reflection than usual!

Our first thread in the Lectionary readings for the Old Testament echoes back to the birth of the prophet Samuel. We began this thread after Pentecost with the stories of Saul, David and Solomon--then we entered the Wisdom Literature stories of Esther and Job—then completed our wisdom journey by circling back to Ruth, a few generations before David. We have come full circle in this journey through Pentecost, with only one more Sunday remaining.

1 Samuel 1 contains the story of Samuel’s parents, Elkanah and Hannah, and their struggles to have a child. Elkanah had another wife who was able to have children, but Hannah was not. This is a familiar story that runs throughout the Bible, from Abraham and Sarah all the way to Zechariah and Elizabeth. We hear of God’s faithfulness to Hannah and the birth of the child Samuel. In the other similar stories of the Bible, it is often a messenger of God who promises a child to the father, and sometimes both the father and mother—but in this story, God hears Hannah. God responds to Hannah through the prophet Eli, but it is Hannah’s faith and Hannah’s prayer that God hears.

The second chapter of Samuel is paired with the first reading as an alternate to the psalm, but it could also be read as the first reading. This is Hannah’s Song, which we will hear echoed in the great Magnificat sung by Mary, in just a few weeks into Advent. While Hannah sings praise to God for what God has done for her, she also sings praise for what God has done for all the people, especially the lost and the least. Mary, too, will sing of what God has done for the whole world, not just for her. Both Hannah and Mary recognize that God’s faithfulness and fulfillment to them is a blessing for the whole world, not just for them. They recognize God’s work in the wholeness of the world.

Our second thread has been through the prophets, and we have two choices this week due to Thanksgiving: Daniel 12:1-3 speaks to the resurrection of the dead, a theological idea arising in Judaism in the last two centuries before Jesus, an understanding that the “day of the Lord” may have more lasting implications than for those left living on earth. The resurrection gives hope to those who are living now, who know that the hope for the future may be beyond their lifetime. The resurrection gives hope for those whose loved ones have gone. The resurrection means that the work of God is not just to one person or one group of people in one particular time, but has eternal, worldwide fulfillment: the God who spoke at the end of Job, the God who created the entire universe, has given all of creation a greater purpose than the one we can see, for resurrection grants us the greatest hope—that all can be saved, that God’s faithfulness truly can endure forever.

Joel 2:21-27, the reading for Thanksgiving Day, reminds us that God will come through. God’s faithfulness endures forever, and that even in the darkest of times, we can hold on to the hope of God’s blessings. Joel gives hope to those in exile by reminding them that though times are difficult, though they have had to give up everything they knew, God will restore what they have. Though things are scarce, in God’s world there is plenty and they will participate in the harvest. We know that God is always with us, and when we remember this, God will provide.

Psalm 16 sings of trusting in God and in God’s ways. In our lives we have a plethora of choices. If we remember to choose God’s ways, we will never go away empty. We will always be satisfied in God. This doesn’t mean times won’t be hard, but it does mean we know God is always with us, and we always have hope.

Psalm 126 is a song of praise, remembering God’s faithfulness in the past and looking forward to God’s deliverance. We are reminded that when we are faithful to God we will be satisfied and our needs fulfilled. We are called to sing even in times of mourning, to remember that God will be faithful to us.

Matthew 6:25-33 reminds us that when we are with God, we know our needs are met. This does not mean we should not work and we should not care about the needs of others, but it does mean that we should not worry about what we have in comparison to others. Often we set our needs by what other people have—we “need” a better car because our neighbors just bought a new car. We “need” a bigger house because other families our size live in much more square footage. Rather, we know with God we are content, and our earthly possessions do not matter. Don’t worry about those other things, for God provides us with the ability to have what we need, and to help others who are in need.

Mark 13:1-8 tells of Jesus proclamation of the destruction of the temple. All along the road to Jerusalem he has been speaking of his own death and resurrection, but now Jesus begins to give a glimpse into what the future holds. Mark is considered the earliest writer of the Gospels, around the time of the temple’s destruction. While the temple is destroyed by Romans during the Jewish Revolt in 66-70 AD, Jesus’ foretelling of the temple’s destruction is a vision that the way of worship and belief in God will never be the same after Jesus. Jesus also speaks on occasion of the temple as a metaphor for his own body. Jesus changes the course of history and the path of faith for both Jews and later Christians. Temple sacrifice is no more, temple worship is no more. Both Jews and later Christians will have a very different understanding of God and their relationship with God after the destruction of the temple, but it begins with the life of Jesus, who turned all things upside down.

1 Timothy 2:1-7 reminds us that we are all called to pray for our earthly leaders. After our election in the U.S., this is a powerful reminder that even when we disagree with our leadership, we are called to pray for them. Many of us forget this. The writer reminds Timothy that there is one God, one mediator in Christ, and therefore God is the God of all people. In the writer’s time, Jews were still governed by Jewish leaders but under the Roman government, and while there were some who did not recognize the Roman authority or wanted to overthrow it, we are reminded that Christ’s reign is not of this world, but we are part of this world. We are called to participate in this world, and to pray for the leadership in this world.

Hebrews 10:11-25 completes our journey through Hebrews at the end of this season. We are reminded that Jesus fulfills the rituals of forgiveness that were performed in the temple; therefore those rituals are no longer needed, for all are forgiven. Jesus is both priest and sacrifice, fulfilling and completing the role of the temple. This may be foreign to us, and would have been foreign to Gentile Christians, but for Jewish Christians this would have made sense, a way of understanding the role of Jesus in their custom and culture. But it is not the only way to understand Jesus. The writer of Hebrews wants to be clear to a particular group of Jewish Christians that the customs of old have been fulfilled; therefore, there is no need to repeat them. For Gentile Christians, these customs were never needed. But what is needed is faith, faith in Christ, faith in Christ’s forgiveness, and faith in Christ’s own faithfulness, to the point of dying on a cross.

We give thanks for God’s faithfulness. We give thanks for the ways God is at work in our world. Even when we are consumed by what is going on in our life, our own problems, our own worries, God is at work in the world around us, God is at work in the universe, and God’s steadfast love and faithfulness endure forever. It may be hard to see that at times through our own narrow vision, when all we see is our own hardships and struggles, but we see in these scriptures the promise of resurrection, the fulfillment of God’s justice and mercy, and the hope of the future. From Hannah to Hebrews, we see that there is something greater going on than the struggles of one person or one people, and God hears our prayers, and desires to save the whole world.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 100)

Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving!

**Enter God’s courts with praise!**

Give thanks to God and bless God’s name!

**For God is Good, and God’s love endures forever!**

God is faithful to all generations!

**Praise the Lord!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Prayer of Confession

Living God, we give You thanks on this day for all Your works in creation. We thank You for the bounty of harvest and the beauty of the earth. Forgive us, O God, when we have been short-sighted and have used the earth for our own gain, rather than caring for the earth as Your creation. Forgive us, O God, when we have made our own worries and frets greater problems for others, rather than lifting up our concerns to You. Guide us in ways we may live our lives that help to sustain the earth. Help us to seek Your vision for our lives. Remind us that there is a difference between our wants and needs, and help us to discern the difference, so that we might help our neighbors in need. Call us into greater ways of love and service, as we remember those who are still struggling in the aftermath of the storms on the East Coast and other tragedies. Lead us to share and give and to reach out in vital ways that we can show Your love and care to others. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Hebrews 11)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. By faith we know God’s mercy and forgiveness. By faith we know God’s reconciliation and peace. By faith we know we are forgiven, renewed, and called to serve in this world. Go with this Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, we lift up our prayers to You, giving thanks for all You have done in creation. We thank You in this time for what we have, for the needs that are met. We pray to You to guide us in ways of fulfilling the needs of others, that we might be Your hands and Your feet on earth. We lift up to You our burdens and cares, our unmet needs. We pray that You will call us to live in ways that are mutually fulfilling and sustaining of others around our globe and of all creation. We thank You for all the gifts You have given us—gifts of love, friendship and family—and help us to share these greater gifts to those who are without. In the name of Christ, who sets the table before us in the meal of remembrance, and calls us into new life, we pray. Amen.