Worship Resources for November 18th, 2018—Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Thanksgiving Sunday (U.S.)

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Samuel 1:4-10 and 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Daniel 12:1-3 and Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:11-14, (15-18), 19-25; Mark 13:1-8

Thanksgiving: Joel 2:21-27 and Psalm 126; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Matthew 6:25-33

Narrative Lectionary: Swords into Plowshares, Isaiah 36:1-3, 13-20; 37:1-7; then 2:1-4 (Matthew 5:14)

The first selection of the Hebrew scriptures is the story of the birth of Samuel, the prophet who would anoint the first kings of Israel. Hannah, like many women in these ancient stories, was unable to conceive, and she prayed for a child. She promised God that if she had a male child (for in those days, a woman’s worth was connected to her ability to have sons for inheritance purposes) she would dedicate him to God, have him set aside as a nazirite, as Samson was by his own mother. A nazirite was someone dedicated to God who lived by strict rules, such as not cutting their hair and not drinking alcohol. God hears Hannah’s prayers, and she gives birth to Samuel.

In 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Hannah prays a song of praise to God, for God is a God of justice, who lifts up the poor and the oppressed and gives them the seats of princes and rulers. Those who were full will be hungry, and the hungry will be filled. Mary, in Luke 2, sings a similar song in praise of God.

The selection from Daniel is part of the apocalyptic literature in the Hebrew scriptures. In the end times the archangel Michael, the patron angel of Israel, will rise. Physical battles on earth were seen as having heavenly counterparts in Daniels’ vision, and Michael will rise at the end to protect Israel. The concept of resurrection, of a final judgment, is first referred to in these verses.

Psalm 16 is a prayer seeking God’s protection and deliverance. The psalmist and the people have chosen God instead of other gods, knowing that God will always be with them. The psalmist blesses God who gives counsel and instruction, who leads the people into the way of life.

The writer of Hebrews, writing to a Jewish audience, comes to their final conclusion about the need of sacrifice in Hebrews 10. Jesus is our high priest and is the final and last sacrifice in the writer’s view, and now all are able to come before God. No priest is needed, for Jesus is the high priest over all. The writer quotes the prophet Jeremiah that God is the one who forgives and remembers sins no more, that the law of God is now in the hearts of all. The writer concludes this section with words of encouragement, to “provoke” one another to good deeds, as they await the Day of God, or day of judgment.

Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple in Mark 13:1-8. While Mark’s gospel account was the earliest, it was probably written just after the temple was actually destroyed. However, Jesus, and perhaps others, could see that the conflict between the Jewish people and the Roman empire was going to erupt, and the Jewish Revolt that took place a generation after Jesus’ death. While the disciples want to know when this is going to take place, Jesus warns them not to be alarmed or led astray, because nations will rise up against nation and there will be famines and natural disasters, but these in themselves are not the end times, only the beginning of labor pains.

The Thanksgiving readings begin with the prophet Joel, who calls upon the people not to be afraid. Though they have seen much hardship, God is with them. God will provide for the animals of the field, God will provide the rain, and abundant grain shall come forth. The people will know that God is with them, that there is no other god, and they will never again be put to shame.

Psalm 126 sings of God restoring the fortunes of Zion, of those who returned home from exile, and sings of hope for the people in their day as they recall God’s faithfulness. Not only shall they celebrate, coming home carrying the sheaves, but other nations will see what God has done for them. The people will become an example of God’s faithfulness.

The writer of 1 Timothy urges prayers of thanksgiving in chapter 2 for everyone, but especially for kings and rulers, so that all may lead a life of quiet and peace. The writer declares there is only one God, and one mediator, Jesus Christ, and that God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth.

As part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the disciples not to worry. In Matthew 6:25-33, Jesus asks is by worrying they can add a single minute to the span of their lives. Instead, they ought to look to God’s creation and know that as God provides for creation, God will provide for us, for there is enough on this earth. If we strive for God’s reign and righteousness, we will make sure everyone has enough; therefore, we will have enough.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Isaiah’s vision of swords into plowshares. In these selections from Isaiah 36 and 37, Jerusalem is attacked by Assyria, which conquered Israel to the north twenty years before. King Hezekiah shows public repentance and mourning by tearing his clothes and putting on sackcloth. But the prophet Isaiah tells Hezekiah not to lose heart, that the Assyrian king will withdraw, and the city will be saved. Isaiah, back in chapter two, has a vision of a time when war shall be learned no more, when they shall go back to farming, and there will be peace.

In Matthew 5:14, Jesus declares to the disciples and those who have gathered to hear his sermon that they are the light of the world, just as a city built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Jesus declares that his kingdom is not of this world, and yet we pray for the kingdom to come. We celebrate God’s abundance that God has provided for all people, and yet we know that there are people who starve to death in this world. Things are not as they should be, but God’s intentions remain. God created a world in which there is enough, if we live into God’s ways. If we follow the ways of the world we have made, we have to make sure we have our needs met first, for there isn’t enough. We live in fear of everything falling apart. We must fight one another in order to survive. But if we follow the ways of Christ, if we believe that our God is the God who made everything, we know that peace can and will come if we strive for God’s reign. If we strive to love our neighbors and make sure others have enough, we will find that our needs are met. If we strive for justice for all, we will find that peace will come and prevail. Like Hannah’s song, we know that God is a God of justice, who will take from those who are full, and give to those who have none. God’s justice is restorative, back to God’s intention. If we trust God and God’s ways, even during the parts that are painful (for it will always feel bad for the rich to lose, for the full to become hungry, for those on high to be brought down), we will see the fulfilment of God’s reign and that there truly is enough for all.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 105:1-5)

O give thanks to God, call upon God’s name;

 **Tell everyone what God has done for us.**

Sing to God, sing praises to God;

 **Tell everyone of all God’s wonderful works.**

Glory in God’s holy name;

 **Let the hearts of those who seek God rejoice.**

Seek God’s presence continually;

 **Remember all the wonderful works God has done.**

For God is good, and we come to worship God;

 **We remember together, we pray together, and we tell God’s story together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, Maker of Heaven and Earth, we confess to You that we have believed in the myth of scarcity. We have denied Your abundance and have hoarded what we have. We have believed in the myth that we must make sure we have enough before we can help others. We have failed to trust in You and what You have provided for us. We have forgotten the ways of Jesus, who taught us to serve one another, to share what we have with others, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Teach us again, O God, so that we might learn, so that we might let Your wisdom take root in our hearts and minds. May we follow the ways of Christ, and truly love our neighbors by meeting their needs, and trust that You know our needs and will fulfill them. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

When we live into God’s abundance, we know that there is enough for all when we share what we have. When we live into God’s abundance, we know that God’s love is far greater than what we can comprehend. When we live into God’s abundance, we know that there is nothing we can do that will separate us from God’s love. You are forgiven, loved, and restored. Now go, share in God’s abundance, and work for the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Prayer

Great God, instill in us a spirit of gratitude. May we know each moment as a blessing, each atom as a miracle, each breath as a gift. May Your spirit of gratitude penetrate all the defenses we have put up, so that we might truly understand how blessed we are, and that we have a responsibility to help others. May Your spirit of gratitude overwhelm our fears, shatter the walls we have constructed, and instead, guide us to building bridges with those on the margins. May Your spirit of gratitude be in us now and forever. Amen.