Worship Resources for November 19th, 2017—Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Thanksgiving Sunday (US)

Revised Common Lectionary: Judges 4:1-7 and Psalm 123; Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18 and Psalm 90:1-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

Thanksgiving Sunday: Deuteronomy 8:7-18; Psalm 65; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Luke 17:11-19

Narrative Lectionary: Isaiah—A Child is Born, 9:1-7 (John 8:12)

We come to the conclusion of our journey with the Hebrew people in their origins in this season after Pentecost, from Abraham and Sarah to their great-grandchildren in Egypt; from the rise of a people whom Pharaoh perceived as a threat to their freedom in the wilderness across the Red Sea, led by Moses until Joshua led them into the land promised them. Now, we find the people living as tribes, with judges raised up by God, and in this passage, Deborah is the judge of Israel, and the people are once again oppressed by another king. Deborah is also a prophet, and she calls upon Barak from Naphtali to take the armies of Naphtali and Zebulun and to be ready, for God has called Deborah to deliver King Jabin’s army into her hand.

Psalm 123 uses both male and female imagery for God, as master and mistress. The psalmist identifies with the lowly, with the poor, with those who serve great masters and mistresses. The psalmist cries out for mercy from God for God’s faithful, specifically for those who are looked upon with scorn and contempt by the proud, by the nobility. Psalm 123 is the worker’s psalm, the ones who have been oppressed, and cry out for mercy from God, whom they have remained faithful to.

The prophet Zephaniah warns against complacency in 1:7, 12-18. Zephaniah declares that the day of the Lord is coming. Zephaniah counters the prophet Isaiah’s words of Isaiah 65, in that those who are complacent will build houses but not live in them, that what they have will be taken away (whereas in Isaiah 65, the faithful will build houses and live in them). Zephaniah warns that their complacency, those who do not fear or have awe of God will find themselves facing the consequences of their actions. Money isn’t going to be able to save them, for they are living into the ways of the world, and not God’s ways, and they will meet their end.

Psalm 90 instructs us to be wise with our days. The psalmist declares that our days are short, swept away like a dream. To God, who is eternal, our lives are like a watch period in the night. We come from the earth and return to the earth quickly, so while we have time on earth, may we count our days with wisdom.

Paul concludes his letter to the Thessalonians, reminding them that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Paul urges them to be prepared, to not be complacent, but to be awake and ready, living out their faith. Paul compares children of the night with those who get drunk, who are only living for life’s pleasures, instead of living for God and for one another as children of the day. As the years passed after Christ’s resurrection, Paul was assuring the churches that Christ will come again, and we must be active in our waiting.

Jesus tells the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30. This is a difficult parable, for it does not seem fair—the one who was afraid, who only gave back what had been given to him, is the one who is seen as wicked and lazy. This is not a parable about investments, but rather a parable about being entrusted with God’s resources. Do we hold on to our own life and live only for ourselves, because we are afraid of losing, or do we risk for God? If we do not risk, we are bound to lose.

The Thanksgiving selections begin with Moses declaring that God is leading the people to a good, prosperous land in Deuteronomy 8. The people will eat their fill and bless God for what God has given them. The people are called to remember that all they have, all they celebrate, has come from God. They are not to say that their own work brought them this; instead, they are to give thanks and remember that everything came from God.

The psalmist praises God in Psalm 65 for God’s deliverance. God has made the mountains and the sea, and provided for the people on the dry land between. God has watered the land, so that the harvest is the crown of the year. God has provided for the people by providing for the earth, so the people may experience the abundance of God.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15 seems to balance the parable of the Talents—those who sow sparingly will reap sparingly. Those who sow bountifully will reap bountifully. God loves a cheerful giver, and God is the one who gives us the seeds to sow. If we are generous in our love for one another, God is generous in God’s love for us, and we will experience the abundance of God’s love in our own lives.

Luke 17:11-19 tells the story of another “Good Samaritan,” when Jesus heals ten lepers who come to him. The only one who came back to thank him was a Samaritan—an outsider of another religious tradition, one of whom Jesus’ own people despised. But though they were all made clean, the Samaritan still would not be included with the others, because of his ethnic and religious background. But he comes instead and thanks Jesus, and Jesus tells him that his faith has made him well.

The Narrative Lectionary begins to move into Advent, looking at Isaiah 9:1-7. Though this passage in Christianity is often interpreted as referring to Jesus, Isaiah was writing about the birth of the new king Hezekiah in his day, a new king that the people hoped would lead in the ways of God’s justice and righteousness. The people who walked in darkness now have their light, and God is with them in this new dawn, this new era, this new king.

Jesus declares in John 8:12 that he is the light of the world. Whoever follows him will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. “Light of life” is a theme in John’s Gospel account, the idea that the light of life does not extinguish at death, but is eternal.

In this season of giving thanks, we know that all we have comes from God. If we say we pulled ourselves up by our bootstraps and earned it ourselves, we have deceived ourselves. Many others paved the way before us, but God is ultimately the one who has given us everything. And we are called to use those resources for God’s work, and not for our own selfish gain. For the ways of this world will lead to ruin, and in the end, even money can’t save us from death. Only God’s love can, and that love is a free gift. We know this gift through Jesus the Christ, who has taught us how to love one another and to live with one another, as the prophets before him did.

Call to Worship

For the bounty of the earth,

 **We give You thanks, O God,**

 **And heed Your call to care for the earth.**

For food and water and shelter,

 **We give You thanks, O God,**

**And heed Your call to serve one another.**

For abundant and eternal life,

 **We give You thanks, O God,**

**And heed Your call to love You, and to love our neighbor as ourselves.**

For all things in all seasons,

 **We give You thanks, O God,**

**As we enter this time of worship with praise and thanksgiving.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, we confess to You that we have wanted our share. We have taken what we thought we deserved. We have declared we worked for it, we earned it, so it is ours. We have claimed authority to determine who is worthy of our aid. Forgive us for our selfishness. Forgive us for not honoring You as God, the One who gave us the earth and all that is in it. Forgive us for ignoring our siblings in need. Call us into the work of justice for those who are hungry, those who are without shelter, those who are without healthcare. In the name of Your Son Jesus, who came so that all might have life abundantly, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God made you, and you are fearfully and wonderfully made. God made the earth, and gave us each a place in it. God made everything, and there is enough if we share what we have. Go, serve one another, share out of the resources you care for, and know that through God’s love, there is more than enough to go around. Amen.

Prayer

Great Creator, help us to live into Your image, to be co-creators with You. Help us to care for the earth and all that is in it. Help us to care for one another by making sure their basic needs are met. Help us to work with local leaders to help the most vulnerable in our communities, and to work to change policies that harm those on the margins. Call us into the work of love, justice, and peace, as we give thanks to You for all we have. Amen.