Worship Resources for November 20th, 2016—Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Reign of Christ Sunday, Thanksgiving Sunday (United States)

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 46 or Luke 1:68-79; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Narrative Lectionary: Daniel’s Hope in God, Daniel 6:6-27 (Luke 23:1-5)

The prophet Jeremiah calls out the leaders who have led the people astray, who have abandoned the poor and the widow and the outcast. God instead will gather those who have been astray, those who were lost, and will bring them together. God will raise up good leaders, and God promises to raise up a good king, one that will unite the people and not let them be led astray again, a righteous branch from David.

Psalm 46 sings of the assurance of God’s peace and presence in the midst of conflict and trouble. Though everything might be falling apart, the psalmist declares we will not be afraid. When all nations are in an uproar, when war is upon the earth, God is the one who is steadfast and is above all. Be still; know that God is near, and that God is above all and exalted above all.

Luke 1:68-79 is the song of Zechariah, praising God who has raised up a Savior, fulfilling a promise made to their ancestors, all the way back to Abraham that is now being fulfilled to them. Through Zechariah and Elizabeth, their son will be called the prophet of the Most High, the one who will prepare the way, proclaiming the baptism of repentance for forgiveness of sins. God is shining a new light, one that breaks open the way of peace.

Colossians 1:11-20 is the declaration by Paul that in Christ we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. We are now part of the kingdom of Christ, who is the head of the church and the firstborn of all creation, and also the fullness of humanity and God, in which peace was made through the cross, in the joining of humanity and God together without the separation of sin.

Luke 23:33-43 contains the account of the crucifixion of Jesus. Luke’s account includes two others who were crucified with him, one who mocks him, and another who rebukes the first, and asks Jesus to remember him when he comes into his kingdom. Jesus declares that on that day, he will be with Christ in paradise. Jesus has not even died and he has already promised eternal life to this man, who was not baptized, who was not a disciple, who was a criminal already suffering his death—and yet he experiences redemption himself on the cross.

Daniel survives the lion’s den in the Narrative Lectionary selection of Daniel 6:6-27. The leaders did not like Daniel and how close he was to King Darius of Persia, so they set out to trap him by getting the king to issue an edict that anyone who worshiped any deity or person that was not the king would be thrown into the lion’s den. Of course, Daniel is thrown in, because he is faithful, but he is not harmed, because he is faithful. Daniel declares to Darius that angels shut the mouths of the lions and protected him because he stayed faithful to God. Darius is so angry about what happened that he has those leaders who were trying to get Daniel killed thrown in the lion’s den instead.

In Luke 23:1-5, Jesus is before Pilate, and false accusations have been brought against him, including that Jesus is claiming to be an earthly king. Their understanding of the Messiah was that he was to be a king like David, who would restore the literal kingdom of Israel. When Jesus didn’t do this, they used that against him, as a way of saying he was trying to usurp Pilate’s authority. But when Pilate asks Jesus if he is the king of the Jews, he simply replies, “You say so,” and Pilate does not find any basis for their charges, but the leaders insist Jesus is stirring up the people against Pilate and the governing authority.

Call to Worship (from Revelation 7:9-10, 12)

There will be a great multitude that no one can count,

 **From every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,**

Coming before the throne, crying out in a loud voice,

 **Salvation belongs to our God, and to the Lamb!**

Blessing and glory and wisdom,

 **Thanksgiving, honor, power, and might,**

Be to our God,

 **Forever and ever, Amen!**

Come, worship our God, who reigns forever!

 **Come, lift your hearts with thanksgiving and praise**

**to Christ who reigns forever!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Creation, we come before You confessing that we have not been grateful for what we have, but instead have complained about what we don’t have. We have longed to have the things others have, even when we don’t need them, even when they would be harmful to us. We have harmed others over things that are of this world and are unnecessary to our lives. We have ignored the beauty of Your creation in each of us, the diversity that makes us unique, and instead have strived for conformity and insisted that others be like us. Forgive us for denying Your image in others. Forgive us for desiring the things we have created instead of what You have created. Forgive us, most of all, for not seeing Your face in the faces of others. You came to us in human flesh, lived our lives, and yet we still cannot see our common humanity in others. Forgive us. Turn us back to You, and to Your commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

There is healing and hope in the presence of the Spirit. There is forgiveness and justice in the ways of Christ. There is love and new life in knowing God our Savior. Come, follow Jesus, live in the Spirit, and know God. The world needs you, because God made you. Go into the world, even if you aren’t fully healed, even if you don’t feel fully forgiven or loved—because God is waiting in the presence of our neighbors and those in need. It will come. Join in the movement, the dance of our God. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of Life, in this season of Thanksgiving, it is easy for us to skip ahead to the commercialization of Christmas. In the aftermath of our election cycle, it is easy for us to fall into hopelessness and cynicism. Bring us back to this moment, in which You are alive and active in each of us, in our lives, and in our world. Bring us back to this moment, in which You are breathing new life into us now. Bring us into this moment and away from the violence and hate of the world, to see Your promise for abundant life, Your promise of love and Your promise of redemption, now. Be with us, and make Your presence known to us in each and every moment. Amen.