Worship Resources for November 24th—Twenty-Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Reign of Christ Sunday, Thanksgiving Sunday

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

We have come full circle in our Revised Common Lectionary, standing at the end of church year C, and the end of the three year-cycle. We have come to Christ the King/Reign of Christ Sunday.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks out as the people prepare for exile that God will raise up a shepherd who will not mislead them. God will raise up a leader who will be just, who will guide them into safety. For the people of Israel, this was the promise that they would return, that God would lead them home. As Christians, we have to be weary of reading Jesus into this passage; for the people of Jeremiah’s day, they longed for a restoration of their land, a restoration they saw fulfilled in the return from exile. This is not to mean that our Jewish friends have not also looked to this passage for hope of a future Messiah, but that they saw hope for their time, for their people, for a not-to-distant future generation. For every passage that Christians see in the Hebrew Scriptures as referring to Jesus as the Messiah, there are many more passages that also point to hope for the people coming soon, or a hope that is still to be fulfilled. This is to say we ought to be careful in our interpretation. We Christians see Jesus as a future king, and we read these words of hope from Jeremiah’s time and place our hope in Jesus; but others read these words and find hope in God in different ways, and we must honor and understand that.

Instead of two psalm choices, this week we are offered the Song of Zechariah as an alternative (and personally, this is one of my favorite passages in the Bible!) As we prepare for Reign of Christ Sunday and our Gospel looks to the future, we begin a little before Jesus in this song, hearing the words of hope from the priest Zechariah of the mighty savior who is coming. Zechariah sings of hope for his own son, who will be the prophet of the Most High, who will preach of forgiveness of sins. And finally (with what I think are among the most beautiful words of Scripture) “By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (vs. 78-79). God’s light is coming into the world in a new way, a dawn that will break on high, and guide us into the way of peace. As we prepare for Advent, this is a perfect image of the “prequel” of Advent.

Psalm 46 is also a song of peace, that God, who is the creator of all the earth, will bring an end to war, breaking the bow and shattering the spear and burning the shields with fire (vs 9). This God calls us to be still and know who God is. While the world is in an uproar and nations are falling, God call us to be still. To not trust in weapons or might but to trust in God, who brings peace.

Luke 23:33-43 is a passage from the final words of Jesus, as he is being crucified. First, Jesus asks for God to forgive those who are crucifying him, “for they do not know what they are doing” (vs. 34), as they are mocking him and dividing up his clothing. But even as one of the other criminals mocks him, another asks Jesus to remember him “when you come into your kingdom” (vs. 42). Jesus gives hope that the kingdom has come near: “Today you will be with me in paradise” (vs. 43). The hope is now. The future has come near. The promise is for all time. Today, we can be part of the kingdom of God. Today, we can be in God’s reign. Today, we can be in paradise. Today, we can know the salvation of our God. We are not looking to a future time, after we are gone, but a time that transcends time. The resurrection begins here and now. New life begins here and now. Eternity begins here and now.

Colossians 1:11-20 begins with a blessing for the readers and an assurance that Christ is the one who reigns. God is the one who has “rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (vs. 13). We are no longer separated from God, but part of God’s reign, part of the Beloved Community. Through Christ, God has reconciled all things (vs. 20) and has made peace. This is the same God who is the beginning and the end.

Alpha and Omega. The same God who brought forth creation brought forth Jesus, and is bringing forth a kingdom, a reign, in which the dividing wall of death is gone. The division between heaven and earth is obliterated. Resurrection happens now. New life happens now. The promises of God are fulfilled, if we live into it. We are the ones who have to accept, to believe, to have faith, to hope, and to live into this acceptance, belief, faith, and hope; and most of all, love. God has come to make peace. God has come to tell us that today, we are with God. There is no more separation. God is the beginning and the end.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 136:1,4,6, 25-26)

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good,

**For God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

Who alone does great wonders,

**For God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

Who spread out the earth on the waters,

**For God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

Who gives food to all creatures

**For God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good,

**For God’s steadfast love endures forever. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Eternity, we confess that we have lived in one part of time and not another. We have either lived in the now, or we have lived in the past, or we have lived in the future. We have lived to have pleasure and satisfaction now. We have longed for the good days of the past. We have saved away everything for a future we do not hold yet. Forgive us for not living present in all times, in thankfulness for the past or in gladness that the past is gone. Forgive us for not living in mindfulness in this time of our neighbors around us, or the repercussions of our actions in the future. Forgive us for putting all our hope into the future instead of seeing the beauty that is around us now. Help us to live as eternal people, Your children, who belong to heaven and earth, past, future, and present. In the name of Jesus, who was and who is and who is to come, the Almighty, Redeemer, and Sovereign of All, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Jesus will not forget you. Jesus has loved you from before you were, and loves us long after we have walked this earth. God is the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Rebekah and Isaac, of Jacob and Rachel and Leah. God is the God of the Living, the one who spoke to Moses through the burning bush and danced with Miriam after the people crossed the Red Sea. God is the God who speaks hope through the prophets, and loves through the person of Jesus. You are loved. You are forgiven, and You are part of the reign of God, now and throughout eternity. Amen.

Prayer

God of Creation, we give thanks this day for all You have made: the universe that we still cannot grasp, this tiny planet in this small galaxy in this small space that You created for us. We give You thanks for this world that we still cannot behold in one glance; the diversity of life that flourishes here, the beauty of our mountains and rivers, prairies and oceans, deserts and glaciers. We give You thanks for providing a home for us filled with nourishment for our whole self, mind, body and soul. We thank You for the gifts in our lives: the gifts of the harvest time, the gifts of friendship, the gifts of family, the gifts of faith community. Call us into a life full of gratitude, that we may recognize the blessings around us and within us, that we might give out of these blessings to bless others. May our lives reflect the blessings that You have given to all humanity, to all creation. May we live in Your ways, that we might be reconciled to the earth, to others, and to You, in all that we do. In the name of Christ, we give thanks and offer our prayers. Amen.