Worship Resources for November 24th, 2019—Reign of Christ Sunday, Thanksgiving Sunday (U.S.)

Revised Common Lectionary:

Reign of Christ: Jeremiah 23:1-6 and Luke 1:68-79 or Psalm 46; Colossians 1:11-20; Luke 23:33-43

Thanksgiving: Deuteronomy 26:1-11 and Psalm 100; Philippians 4:4-9; John 6:25-35

Narrative Lectionary: Josiah’s Reform, 2 Kings 22:1-10 (11-20); 23:1-3 (Luke 24:30-32)

We conclude the season after Pentecost with Reign of Christ Sunday. The prophet Jeremiah calls out the leaders who have led the people astray in 23:1-6. These shepherds have scattered the flock of God, driving them away. God will come and gather together the remnant, bringing them back to the fold. God will raise up new shepherds, ones who will not lose any sheep, and the sheep will no longer be afraid. God will also raise up a king from the branch of David, one who will rule with wisdom, executing justice and righteousness. The prophet foresees a time when the people will live in safety with a new leader.

The Song of Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79 is a song of praise from the priest upon the birth of his son, John. However, the song is about the one that God has raised up, a mighty Savior from the house of David. Zechariah’s son will be called the prophet of the Most High, and has come before the Savior to prepare the way. For God’s light is about to break forth, to guide the people from death into life, and into the way of peace.

Psalm 46 is a song of praise, for God is the people’s refuge and help. The psalmist calls upon the people to not be afraid, because God is in the midst of the chaos around them. God is in their city, and God is above all kingdoms. God is the one who brings peace, who causes wars to end, and God also calls upon the people to be in awe, to be still and know that God is present with them. Their God, who is above all gods, is with them, and is their refuge.

As part of the introduction to the letter of Colossians, in 1:11-20 the writer speaks a blessing to the receiver of the letter: may they be strong enough to endure, while joyfully giving thanks to God. God has rescued them from “the power of darkness” and has given them the kingdom of God’s beloved Son, the one who has redeemed them and forgiven their sins. The writer states their main argument: that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the head of the church, and all things are under his feet. God dwelled fully in Christ to reconcile everything through him, “by making peace through the blood of his cross.”

The Crucifixion of Jesus in Luke 23:33-43 contains the story of the two who were crucified along with Jesus. After the soldiers have mocked him, one of those crucified with him continues to mock him. The other, repenting of what he has done, declares Jesus to be innocent, and asks Jesus to remember him when he enters his kingdom. Jesus declares that “today you will be with me in Paradise.” Jesus declares victory over death, inviting all into the kingdom who repent and seek Jesus.

The readings for Thanksgiving begin with Deuteronomy 26:1-11. The ancient Israelites, as they prepared to settle the land God had given them, were reminded to give thanks to God by bringing the first fruits of harvest as an offering of Thanksgiving. It was a time to remember that their ancestor Abraham had been a wandering Aramean, whose family went to Egypt, and became a great and mighty nation. God brought the people, who had become slaves, out of Egypt into freedom, into a land flowing with milk and honey. When the people bring forth the first fruit, they are to remember and give thanks for the bounty that comes from God.

Psalm 100 is a song of praise, reminding the people that they are the sheep of God’s pasture. God is the one who has made them, and the people are called to enter the gates of the temple with thanksgiving in their heart, to remember that God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi begins to draw to a close with a reminder to the people to rejoice in God. While Paul is in prison, he encourages the church that he helped found and is close to his heart to not worry about anything. Instead, bring their prayers and supplications to God with thanksgiving. Paul encourages them to keep on doing what they have been taught, to endure, and to know that Christ’s peace is with them.

In John 6:25-35, Jesus fed the crowds from five loaves and two fish, but the crowds have stayed, coming to find Jesus the next day across the sea in Capernaum. Jesus tells them not to work for food that perishes, but to work for the food that endures for eternal life. The crowds seem more interested in being able to perform miracles, as they saw with the bread and the fish, but Jesus tells them he is the bread of life. Those who believe will not hunger or thirst spiritually, but instead, will know God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on King Josiah’s reform in 2 Kings 22-23. King Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign. When he was twenty-six, the priest Hilkiah went to the temple, which was still being rebuilt from its partial destruction, on order of King Josiah and rediscovered the book of the law that had been lost. King Josiah tore his clothes in mourning, and sent the priest along with others to the prophetess Huldah, who told Josiah that it was too late—the events set in motion by previous kings who had abandoned God’s ways and had turned to other gods, making poor political choices along the way—destruction still awaited Jerusalem and the people of Judah. However, because Josiah had repented, Josiah would only see peace in his time. Josiah made a covenant with God in front of all the people, to follow God’s ways and to keep the commandments.

The Gospel verses from Luke 24:30-32 are from the resurrection account of Luke, by the ones walking to Emmaus, who didn’t recognize Jesus until he broke bread with them, and he vanished from their sight. But their hearts were burning while he talked with them, and before these passages, Jesus had explained to them how all the prophets had led up to this moment—the cross and resurrection.

Thanksgiving and Reign of Christ Sunday bring our season after Pentecost to a close. Christ is victorious at the cross, defeating death, and calls us into a deeper way of life. With gratitude, we remember all that God has given us, and through Christ we have inherited the kingdom of heaven. We prepare to turn to Advent, beginning the liturgical cycle again, as we watch and wait for signs of Christ’s return in our world and in our lives in a new way.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 100)

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

**Worship the Lord with gladness; come into God’s presence with singing.**

Know that the Lord is God. God made us, and we belong to God.

**We are God’s people, the sheep of God’s pasture.**

Enter the Lord’s gates with thanksgiving, and God’s courts with praise;

**Give thanks to the Lord, bless God’s name.**

For the Lord is good; God’s steadfast love endures forever,

**And God’s faithfulness is to all generations.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Savior of the World, we come before You, confessing that we still hunger and thirst. We know You are the Bread of Life, the Wellspring of Living Water, but we hunger for righteousness and thirst for justice. We crave mercy and forgiveness, and desire peace. We are not satisfied by the ways of the world, we seek the deeper way with You. You are the one who satiates our needs, but our needs have not yet been met, for the world is still broken. Loving Christ, may we not be content until the needs of all have been fulfilled. May we still strive for justice and mercy, as long as injustice harms our neighbors and compassion is scarce. May we know that You are with us, and that You are the only one who will bring us into the fullness of life now and forever, by leading us into the paths of justice, mercy, and forgiveness. May our hunger and thirst bring us closer to You, O Christ our Lord, our Savior, and our Friend. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

May God’s steadfast love endure forever, God’s faithfulness to all generations. May one day your hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness be satisfied. May you know the unconditional love of your God through the love of Jesus Christ, and may you be set free from guilt and shame, from everything that holds you back. You are forgiven of your sins. Go, share the Good News with your neighbors and with all of creation, that our God is faithful, God’s steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

Prayer

God of Abundant Love, You made a world full of beauty and bounty. In this season of Thanksgiving, may our gratitude to You flourish in our acts of kindness to one another, and in our care of the earth. May we live and work with sustainability in mind and stewardship in our hearts. May our way of life conform to Your intention for us, to care for the earth and its creatures, to love our neighbors and meet their needs, to build the beloved community here on earth as it is in heaven. May we care for this planet, for it is the only one You made just for us, and in gratitude may we take care of it for the generations that will come after us. In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we pray. Amen.