Worship Resources for November 25, 2018—Reign of Christ Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 23:1-7 and Psalm 132: 1-12 (13-18); Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14 and Psalm 93; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

Narrative Lectionary: Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon, Jeremiah 1:4-10; 7:1-11 (Matthew 21:12-13)

We come to the end of the Season after Pentecost, and our first selection from the Hebrew Scriptures began with the rise of the kings of Israel, moved into wisdom literature, then came full circle through Ruth back to just before the time of Saul and David and the prophet Samuel. This reading is from David’s final words before his death. David utters an oracle, proclaiming God’s everlasting covenant. David has ruled over the people justly, remaining under the awe of God who rules above all. Because of God’s covenant with David, God will “prosper” all of David’s help and desire; God is invested in having David’s reign succeed.

Psalm 132:1-12 (13-18) is a song reminding the people of David’s vow to God, that David would not rest until God had a place to rest, a temple where all could come to worship. In turn, God made a covenant with David that his sons would sit on the throne, if they kept God’s covenant. God chose Zion, the holy city of Jerusalem, to be God’s dwelling place, and God will bless David and his descendants.

Daniel beholds a vision of the cosmic throne of God in Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14. An Ancient One sits upon the throne, who serves as king and judge, and one who is like a human being comes with the clouds of heaven to serve him. This image became a symbol of hope for the Hebrew people during the rule of the Greeks—that God was the one who truly sits on the throne of eternity, not Caesar. The one like a human being was associated with the archangel Michael, seen as representing Israel in the spiritual realm, but came to be associated with a messiah who would come to earth.

Psalm 93 is a song of praise to God, who rules as a king upon an ancient throne. God is the one who established the world. All the waters of the earth praise God, by roaring and waves—images that came from the ancient gods of creation in the worlds around them, but God is more majestic than all the waters, and is above all gods.

John of Patmos begins his letter to the seven churches in Asia with a statement of grace and peace from God who is, and who was, and who is to come—part of an ancient confession of faith. John links Jesus with the image of the one who will come in the clouds, from Daniel’s vision of the heavenly throne room. John declares that those who are receiving this letter are made by God into a kingdom, to be priests that serve God forever.

When Jesus is brought before Pilate and questioned if he is the “king of the Jews,” Jesus reminds him in John 18:33-37 that, “you say I am a king.” Jesus declares that he has a kingdom, but it is not of this world. Pilate doesn’t understand—he’s going off the words of the leaders who handed Jesus over to him, but Jesus declares he has come into this world to testify to the truth. Those who listen to him belong to the truth—they belong to the heavenly kingdom.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Jeremiah’s call by God as a prophet and the sermon he gives in the temple. He wasn’t ready when God called him—he was just a boy—but God told him to not be afraid of those he would be sent to speak to. God would put words into the prophet’s mouth, and he was appointed by God over nations and kingdoms. His words would destroy, but also build up. God called Jeremiah to speak at the gate of the temple, to announce that the people needed to amend their ways; simply being in the temple wasn’t enough to save them, they had to seek God’s presence. God declares through Jeremiah that if they change their ways and practice justice to the marginalized around them, God will be with them. However, at that time, they were worshiping other gods, making sacrifices to Baal, and believed they were safe because they were still in the temple, instead of living how God had called them to live. God is watching, and God is seeing what they are doing in the temple, how they have made it a den of robbers.

Jesus drives out the moneychangers and turns over the tables of those selling doves in Matthew 21:12-13, quoting the prophet Jeremiah that they have made the temple into a den of robbers, because they were extorting the poor. One could only buy an animal acceptable to the priests for sacrifice in the temple, and had to use the temple currency. They were extorting money at the exchange, and sometimes selling animals that would be rejected by the priests, thereby swindling the poor.

On this Reign of Christ Sunday, we remember that Christ’s kingdom is not of this world—and yet, we know from the vision at the end of Revelation, that one day there will be a new heaven and earth, where the dividing line between heaven and earth, death and life, will cease to be. But there will come a time when Christ shall come again—into our world and into our lives in a new way. All our images of God on a throne, of Christ coming on clouds—these are metaphors, images to help us understand, but Christ’s reign is not of this world. We cannot fathom it, but we know that God is above all, beyond all, and yet, with us right now.

Call to Worship (from Revelation 1:5-6, 8)

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead,

 **The king above all kings on earth.**

The one who loved us has freed us from our sins,

 **And has made us to be a kingdom, a beloved community in Christ.**

We are now all priests to one another, serving God together,

**To Christ be the glory and dominion forever, amen!**

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God,

 **The one who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Ancient One, we confess to You that our vision is short-sighted. We see what is in front of us. We perceive only in short segments of time. We become busy with to-do lists and tasks. We worry and fret over the news that is in front of us one week, and forgotten the next. Forgive us for our short-sightedness. Ancient of Days, call us into the long view. Call us into dwelling in Your reign, which is eternal, and far beyond our imagination or understanding. Help us to know You are present with us now and always. In the name of Christ, who came to be with us, who is with us now, and who is coming again, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God is always present with us now, in this moment. Breathe deeply, and breathe in the Spirit of God. Open your hearts, and receive God’s love in Jesus Christ. Awaken your understanding, and know that God is beyond time, God is beyond this world, and God’s reign is forever. You belong to God, and God is with you, now and always. Amen.

Prayer

Eternal God, we hold the paradox that You are doing something new, and something ancient, now. You are with us, and are still coming. You came before and will come again. Your reign is now, and Your kingdom is coming. We cannot wrap our minds fully around the concept of eternity, but we know this: Your love is with us now, and was with us before we came to be, and will be with us in a new way. May we begin to understand all things by trusting in this truth: You love us, always. Amen.