Worship Resources for November 3rd, 2019—Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints Day

Revised Common Lectionary:

All Saints Day: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

21st Sunday after Pentecost: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4 and Psalm 119:137-144; Isaiah 1:10-18 and Psalm 32:1-7; 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12; Luke 19:1-10

Narrative Lectionary: Elijah at Mount Carmel, 1 Kings 18: (17-19) 20-39 (Mark 9:2-4)

For All Saints Day, the selection from the Hebrew Scriptures is the vision of Daniel in chapter 7. Most likely referring to the empires that surrounded them, including the Babylonians and the Greeks who conquered them, the kings rise like beasts out of the sea, the primordial waters of creation, the formless void, the face of the deep. But one of the angels, attending the vision, interprets for Daniel that the holy ones of the Most High are the ones who will receive and dwell in the (true) kingdom forever.

Psalm 149 is a psalm of praise to God, who is the maker and king of all. God takes pleasure in the people of Israel and gives them victory. God will bind the kings of their enemies and bring judgment upon them, and the faithful will rejoice.

The writer of Ephesians declares that through Christ, the faithful have obtained an inheritance—Jews and Gentiles together. Christ is head of all things, and all things are under his feet. God raised Christ from the dead, and that power is at work in Christ. For the saints—the faithful—there is a glorious inheritance.

In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus gives the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Plain. However, in Luke’s account, there are blessings and woes. Blessings to the poor, those who mourn, those who are hungry, those who are persecuted. Woe to those who are rich now, who have plenty to eat, who are rejoicing, who are seen and spoken well of—because a time will come when these will be taken away. Instead, love your enemies, bless others, give to those who are in need, do good—do unto others as you would have them to unto you. Use the life you have now to bless others.

In the readings for the twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost, we begin with the prophet Habakkuk (this was also the second selection of the Hebrew scriptures on October 6th). The prophet Habakkuk prophesies during the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah, speaking of the violence and judgment of the people. Though the prophet cries out to God to listen, the prophet also sees the wrongdoing of the people around him. However, Habakkuk is given a vision by God, a vision of hope for the end to come. The vision is clear, simple and plain, so a runner could read it passing by. The righteous live by faith, and trust that God will fulfill the vision.

In this stanza from Psalm 119, the psalmist sings of God’s righteousness. The psalmist is angry, their enemies do not live into the ways of God, but they know God is righteous, and their judgments are right. The psalmist pleads for understanding, and to live into the commandments and decrees of God.

God is angry with the people of Israel, speaking through the prophet Isaiah in 1:10-18. God is tired of the rituals and sacrifices when the people’s heart isn’t in them. God calls upon the people to make themselves clean by seeking justice, rescuing the oppressed, being in solidarity with the marginalized. God wants to dialogue, to argue with the people, instead of having them pay lip service. God wants them to repent, to turn back, and they will be restored.

Psalm 32:1-7 is often attributed to David, a psalm of receiving forgiveness from God after confession of sin. The psalmist, through their experience, encourages the listener that it is better to confess than to have the sin eating away at you. They were forgiven, and they found refuge in God.

2 Thessalonians is a letter that purports to be from Paul, but is most likely not. Some of the letter contradicts what is in 1 Thessalonians. However, the introduction contains words of encouragement to the church in Thessalonica, giving thanks for their faithfulness, and the love they have for one another. Paul and the others claim to use the church as an example to others of how to have steadfast faith through persecution and suffering, and Paul assures the church that he always prays for them, that the name of Jesus will be glorified through them.

In Luke 19:1-10, Jesus enters Jericho and encounters Zacchaeus, a tax collector who had climbed a tree so that Jesus would find him. The way Jesus calls his name, and Zacchaeus’ response, seems to indicate that Jesus may have known him before. Others are grumbling that Jesus wants to eat at Zacchaeus’ house because he is a tax collector, but Zacchaeus declares that he will give away half of his possessions to the poor, and if he defrauded anyone, will pay them back four times what is owed. Zacchaeus is not the person they all thought he was. Jesus declares he came to seek out and save the lost, and that salvation has come to Zacchaeus’ house.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Elijah challenging the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in 1 Kings 18. In this famous story, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to a sacrificial challenge—they sacrifice a bull and call upon Baal to strike the altar with fire, but this doesn’t happen. Elijah mocks them, for surely if Baal is a real god, he would do what they asked. When it’s Elijah’s turn, he has them douse the altar with his bull with water three times, so it’s drenched. But then Elijah calls upon the Lord to answer him, and fire comes down from heaven and consumes not only the bull, but the entire altar and even the water that had poured off it. The people then turn to worship God, recognizing that the Lord indeed is God.

In Mark 9:2-4, God’s power is revealed through the transfiguration of Jesus upon a high mountain, and Elijah and Moses appear with him. Only Peter, James, and John witness this. Mountains in scripture and in ancient mythology are thin places between earth and heaven, places where the divine is encountered.

All Saints Day reminds us that the veil between us and the great cloud of witnesses is sometimes very thin. Sometimes, we remember that those who have gone before us are still very much with us, in our memories, our laughter and tears, and in our DNA. The Sermon on the Plain from Luke reminds us that what we do now on earth matters. It’s not about after-life, but eternal life, a life that begins now and transcends death. Faithful living, as demonstrated by Zacchaeus, begins now. This is the moment to live, and learn, and be transformed by God through the love of Jesus Christ. We are surrounded by the communion of saints, those with us now and those who have gone before us. We are not alone.

Call to Worship (from Hebrews 11:1, 39; 12:1-2)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for,

**The conviction of things not seen.**

By faith our ancestors trusted in God’s ways;

**By faith they waited for what was promised.**

We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,

**Who lead us to Jesus, the pioneer and protector of our faith.**

We gather in this moment, in communion with our God,

**And with the love and encouragement of all who led the way.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess we have committed the same sins as our ancestors. We have ignored Your ways and settled for empty words and actions. We have forgotten to love our neighbors and instead have taken advantages of systems of privilege and oppression for ourselves. We have failed to heed the warnings of the prophets, of times past and present. But there is still time, O God. We know there is still time to turn back to You. There is still time to make reparations for the wrongs of the past and present. There is still time to do justice and pursue peace. There is still time to forgive and seek reconciliation whenever possible. God, lead us into this time: a time of healing and hope, a time of restoration. Forgive us, restore us, and send us out to share the Gospel, the Good News of Your love for the world. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s steadfast love endures forever. Through the Scriptures, we know that God is always working for restoration, for reconciliation, for healing. Be part of that work. Seek God and forgive yourselves. Seek those you have wronged and begin the process of forgiveness and healing. Forgive those who have wronged you. Do the work of justice to dismantle the systems of sin that hold us all back, and know that God is with you in this holy work. You are loved. You are forgiven. Now go, and live out the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of the Universe, You have created out of chaos, pulling stars and planets out of the explosion of atoms, and You settled an order of revolution and rotation in our spinning galaxy. In the disorder of our lives, You are a constant song, a voice that calls us into the order of life through Your love. You have shaped us from stardust, and sing into us a song of justice, of peace, and of mercy. Help us to find our rhythm in the movement of this universe, and to listen for Your song when the noises of the world we have created are overwhelming. Help us to find that deep down, we are still made by You, in Your image, from the dust of the beginning. Out of the chaos of life, You breathe into us new life, sing Your song, and help us find our way in this universe. Amen.