Worship Resources for November 4th, 2018—Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints Day

Revised Common Lectionary

All Saints Day: Isaiah 25:6-9 and Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

Ruth 1:1-18 and Psalm 146; Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Psalm 119:1-8; Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 12:28-34

Narrative Lectionary: Elisha Heals Naaman, 2 Kings 5:1-15a (Matthew 8:2-3)

For All Saints Day, the Revised Common Lectionary begins with Isaiah’s vision of the heavenly banquet table. In Isaiah 25:6-9, the prophet envisions God inviting all peoples to this banquet table of rich food and well-aged wine. God provides the best, all of the good stuff, and God will destroy death forever. God will comfort all people, wiping their tears from their eyes, and the people will recognize this is their God, the God who has been waiting for them and whom they have been waiting for. God has saved them, and they rejoice in God’s salvation.

Psalm 24 is a call to worship of the congregation, as they prepare to enter the sanctuary. The earth and all that is in it belongs to God; therefore, the people must prepare before they enter the sacred space of God. To enter, one must be authentic. One must not be deceitful or worship what is false, but be true to God, the maker of all. The psalmist then calls the congregation, even the physical sanctuary, to rejoice in God, whom they know as the King of Glory.

John of Patmos beholds a vision of the new heaven and new earth, and the holy city of Jerusalem, in Revelation 21:1-6a. Harkening back to the vision of Isaiah, death is defeated, and God will wipe all tears away. God’s home is now among mortals. There is no division of life and death, no division of earth and heaven—the dividing line is no more. God is the beginning and the end, and all things are made new.

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead in John 11:32-44. In this snippet of the chapter, we begin with Mary confronting Jesus, declaring that if he had been there, her brother would not have died. Jesus is overcome with grief of his friend’s loss. Through his grief, he is moved to ask those who have gathered with the family to roll back the stone, and he calls out to Lazarus to come out. Jesus declares he has done this for the glory of God, so that the crowds know that God hears him. When Lazarus emerges from the tomb, Jesus says, “Unbind him and let him go.

For the Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, the first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures begins with the first chapter of Ruth. This short story begins with Naomi and Elimelech from Bethlehem, who moved to Moab when there was a famine in their land. They bring their sons with them, but Elimelech dies. The sons grow up, marry women from Moab, but then they both die as well. Naomi decides to return to her home, and tells Orpah and Ruth, her daughters-in-law, to go back home, but Ruth refuses to leave her mother-in-law. She recites her own vows to Naomi, and Naomi relents, allowing Ruth to come with her.

Psalm 146 is a song of praise to God, the one in whom we put our trust. Worldly princes will fail us, but God will reign forever. God brings justice for the oppressed and will give food to the hungry. God is with the marginalized: the poor, the strangers, orphans and widows. The psalmist calls upon the congregation to praise God, who reigns forever and for all generations.

The second selection of the Hebrew scriptures contains the Sh’ma is found in Deuteronomy 6:1-9: Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord Alone. The people have one God, and this is the God whom they shall love with all our heart, soul, and might. Moses calls upon the people to commit this to memory, to make this part of their life. This is the centerpiece of Jewish life. The people are called to teach this to their children, to mark this on their doorposts, to make them a sign on their hands and foreheads: so they do not forget.

The psalmist in Psalm 119:1-8 prays a personal prayer that they might stay true to God. They know that those who follow God’s statutes and ordinances are blameless and walk with God. The psalmist desires this closeness with God and prays they will keep their own vision on God’s commandments. The psalmist prays that God will not forsake them in their struggles to stay true.

The Epistle reading continues with Hebrews, in these four verses of chapter 9. Christ is the final and ultimate sacrifice, offering his own blood. Christ’s blood sanctifies and purifies all, ending the practice of sacrifice, so that all may worship the living God.

A scribe questions Jesus in Mark 12:28-34, because he sees that Jesus answered the others well. He asks Jesus which commandment is the greatest, and Jesus answers with the Sh’ma, but also adds to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. The scribe agrees with Jesus that these are more important that the offerings and sacrifices. Jesus tells him that he is not far from the kingdom of God. This passage shows that Jesus was teaching in line with what many other rabbis were thinking, and that not all Jewish leaders were opposed to Jesus. No one dared to ask him any more questions.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5:1-15. We begin with hearing that God had given him victory in battle, though he is the commander of the army of Aram, and is not an Israelite. However, he suffered from leprosy. An Israelite slave who served Naaman’s wife told her of a prophet in Israel who could heal him, and the king of Aram sends a letter to the king of Israel. Nonetheless, the king of Israel does not seem to understand what is being asked of him. He thinks the request is impossible, and he tears his clothes. The king of Aram had requested the king of Israel to heal Naaman, but it was not the king who could heal. Elisha told the king of Israel to let the man come, so he may know that there is a prophet of God in Israel. When Naaman comes with all his chariots, and Elisha tells him to simply bathe seven times in the Jordan to be clean, he is furious. Couldn’t he have just done that at home? But his servants remind him that if it had been a much more difficult task, he would have easily done it; he only balks because it is simple. Naaman relents, bathes in the Jordan, and is made clean. He then declares to Elisha that he now knows there is no other god except the God of Israel.

In Matthew 8:2-3, a leper comes to Jesus and tells him, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Jesus touches the man first, and then declares, “I do choose.” The man is made clean immediately.

For All Saints Day, we are reminded that God has prepared for us something far greater than we can imagine. Our ancestors imagined a banquet table, a holy mountain, a new city; the dividing line between heaven and earth erased forever. The word “unbound” is used when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead; we are no longer bound to the restrictions of this world, the division between now and eternity. So what is eternal? Love. What guides us in this life? Love. What leads us in this life? Love. This is the center of our faith, the center of what has been passed down to us by our ancestors. Love is what brings healing and hope. Love is how we know the same God who called forth our ancestors is the same God calling us now.

Call to Worship

Hear, O people: The Lord is our God, the Lord Alone:

 **We shall love the Lord our God with all our heart,**

**with all our soul, and with all our might.**

Keep these words that God has commanded you in your heart;

 **We will recite them out loud, alone and with our loved ones;**

**We remember them when we wake up, and when we lie down.**

For God is love, and God has commanded us to love one another;

 **May we remember God’s love for us in this time of worship;**

 **May we love one another as Christ loves us.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Eternal Love, we come to You knowing that our vision is short-sighted. We only see the temporary. We only know what we have experienced. We cannot imagine the depths of Your love for us that brings the dead out of the graves. We cannot imagine all that You have created and intended for us. Forgive us when our narrow vision leads us away from hope. Forgive us when fear leads us away from love. Forgive us when anger leads us away from empathy. Lead us back to Your love, for Your love is the center of all creation, of our very being, and what leads us into eternity. In the name of love, Your eternal son Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Romans 8:38-39)

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayer

We give You thanks, O God, for all the saints that have gone before us.

We give You thanks for our ancestors who have shown us by their lives what it is to be faithful.

We give You thanks for our loved ones who have taught us Your love in ways close to our heart.

We mourn those whose lives were cut short.

We miss those who were dear to us.

We grieve the unexpected losses in our lives.

We give You thanks, O God, for the saints who are now at home with You, and we know that through Your love, we have the promise of eternal life.
Through Your love, we have the hope of new life now.

Through Your love, we live into the joy of resurrection.

For all the saints, we give You thanks, O God. Amen.