Worship Resources for November 5th, 2017—Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints Day

All Saints Day Readings: Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

Revised Common Lectionary: Joshua 3:7-17 and Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37; Micah 3:5-12 and Psalm 43; 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13; Matthew 23:1-12

Narrative Lectionary: God Speaks to Elijah, 1 Kings 19:1-18 (John 12:27-28)

For All Saints Day, we begin with the vision of John of Patmos, a vision of the heavenly throne room, full of the diversity and beauty of humanity, people of all tribes and nations and languages, praising God. These are the ones who have come through the great ordeal, those that have remained faithful, and the Lamb will comfort them. Everything they have ever needed is now met, and they have comfort and peace with God.

The psalmist praises and blesses God in Psalm 34:1-10, 22. God has answered their prayers, delivered them from evil, and the psalmist has experienced all the goodness that is God—“O taste and see that the Lord is good!” Those who seek God, will find that all their needs are met in God.

The writer of 1 John declares that we are God’s children. The world doesn’t know this because the world doesn’t know God, but in knowing God, we will know when God is revealed. We will become like God, for we will see God. But the revealing is still to come.

Jesus teaches the disciples the Beatitudes in his Sermon on the Mount, by sharing these blessings. These blessings will not be realized in their lifetime, but in the kingdom of God, the faithful are often not the powerful but the powerless, the poor, the meek, the peacemakers. These shall inherit the reign of God.

For the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, we near the end of our journey with the Hebrew people that began with their ancestors Abraham and Sarah. Just as Moses led the people through the parted waters of the Red Sea, now Joshua, his successor, has been called to lead the people through the parted waters of the Jordan River, to carry the Ark of the Covenant. However, Joshua tells the people that God is going to drive out the people who already live there, but also that God is the “Lord of all the earth.” This passage is a good reminder of the contradictory nature at times of our ancient stories: why would God need to drive out the others if God is the God of all people? For a tribal people, God was their God, but later editions to this passage remind us that there is no other God. We have to live with the tension of understanding that the Hebrews believed this land was given to them by God, and that God is also the God of all people, including those who lived their first, and the implications of this kind of thinking.

The psalmist gives thanks to God in Psalm 107 for leading the people through the wilderness, providing streams in the desert, filling the hungry with good things. God is the one who provides for all in need, giving food to the hungry, water for the thirsty, and a city for the houseless.

The prophet Micah speaks against the false prophets of his day who only speak what is good for them. When life is good for those prophets, they prophecy peace. But when they are struggling, they prophecy war. They will be put to shame, for Micah speaks what God has told him to speak. The rulers and priests and prophets have taken bribes and believe that God is with them, but Micah prophesizes the utter destruction of Jerusalem and those in power. They have forgotten the poor and have thought only of themselves; therefore, they cannot see the destruction coming.

Psalm 43 is a plea to God in desperation. The psalmist has remained faithful, but the people have turned away from God. The psalmist pleads for vindication, and for God to send out light and truth. The psalmist declares they will remain faithful, and will praise God, for their hope and help is in God.

Paul reminds the church in Thessalonica of his earlier ministry. There are those opposed to Paul and his teachings, especially on the inclusion of Gentiles, so Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his work among them, and that he gives thanks to God for them, and that they have continued to do the gospel work as they received it from him.

In Matthew 23:1-12, Jesus teaches the crowds and the disciples to follow the teachings of the religious leaders, but to not do what they do, because they are not living out their teachings. Instead, some of the religious leaders had used the scriptures to keep others out, and to make themselves look religious. Jesus differentiates between looking religious and actually living out one’s faith. When we live out our faith, we do so in humility, not to make ourselves look good.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on God speaking to Elijah. Elijah is on the run from Ahab and Jezebel, and feels utterly alone. He is ready to just give up and die, as he is the last prophet faithful to God (although in chapter 18 it is mentioned that there were one hundred prophets still faithful to God, just hidden by Obadiah). Even though some of the Israelites have remained faithful, Elijah is done. It takes an angel touching him and saying, “Get up and eat.” Go and rest. Refresh yourself before going before God. Then God passes by Elijah—not in the great wind, or earthquake, or fire, but in the sound of sheer silence. Then God tells Elijah to anoint new kings, and a new prophet in his place, Elisha.

In John 12:27-28, Jesus speaks to the disciples before the Last Supper, knowing he is going to die. Jesus asks rhetorically if he should ask God to save him from this hour, as Elijah just wanted to be done. But it is for this reason that Jesus has come to this hour. God’s name is glorified, even though Jesus will face the most difficult time ahead—his own betrayal and death.

Living a life of faithfulness is not easy, and true faithfulness can lead to persecution. When we speak up on behalf of those who are poor, hungry, homeless, immigrants, widows, or others; when we demand justice, we will face opposition. Elijah was ready to give up and die. Paul encouraged the church in Thessalonica to remember what they were taught. Jesus told the people that faith was about action, not about how religious one looked. The most religious people are the ones who give so much they feel ready to give up. It isn’t about their own gain, but about the needs of others. Because it’s easier to be religious than to be faithful. It’s easier to say the right words at the right time, like the false prophets of Micah’s day, then to do the hard work of loving one’s neighbor as one’s self. Faith requires faithful action, not a pretense of religiosity.

Litany for All Saints Day

For the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us,

**We give You thanks, O God, for their faith.**

For the faithful who stayed true to the end,

**We give You thanks, O God, for their courage.**

For the mothers and grandmothers, aunts and uncles, fathers and grandfathers, Sunday School teachers and pastors, coaches and instructors who helped mold and shape us,

**We give You thanks, O God, for their wisdom.**

For our Lord Jesus Christ, who calls the faithful home,

**We give You thanks, O God, for our eternal life with You. Amen.**

Call to Worship (from Matthew 23:8-12)

We have one instructor, our teacher Jesus;

**We are all disciples, students of Jesus Christ.**

We have no parent on earth,

**For we have one parent, our Mother-Father-Creator, the one in heaven.**

None are greatest among us, for all who exalt themselves are humbled,

**But all who humble themselves are exalted by the Spirit of God.**

Come, worship God, made known to us in the Trinity;

**Praise the Creator, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Forgiving God, we confess our sin of pride. We have thought ourselves all-knowing, or knowledgeable enough, that we have forgotten how to listen and learn. We have ignored those who question our authority and privilege, dismissed the claims of harm by those who are oppressed. We have acted as if our view is the only authentic view of the world. Forgive us for our short-sightedness. Forgive us for our part in upholding oppression. Call us into authentic reconciliation which requires that we work for justice, seek forgiveness, and help dismantle systems of oppression. Call us into this difficult work. In the name of Christ, who laid down his life for us, help us to lay down our lives. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are one child of God. One holy, beloved child of God. The hairs on your head are all accounted for. Don’t let it all go to your head. Your siblings in the world are also loved by God, so go and love them, care for them, and know that you are beloved by God as well. Amen.

Prayer

For all the saints, O God, we give thanks. We give thanks for all who have taught us Your ways of love, justice, and peace. We give thanks for all those who have gone before us, who have been an example of Your love and grace in our own lives. We grieve with those who are still grieving, and we know one day we will grieve no more. Until that day, our grief helps shape who we are, and we give You thanks, O God, that we miss those who have gone before us so much because they helped us to become who we are. We give You thanks, O God, for all the saints, for all the faithful, for all who have become one with You. Until that time our oneness is complete, may we strive to live in their light. Amen.