Worship Resources for November 8th, 2015—Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17 or 1 Kings 17:8-16; Psalm 127 or Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:24-28; Mark 12:38-44

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

We began this Season after Pentecost with the Rise of the Kings in this first thread of the Hebrew Scriptures; then we switched to the Wisdom Literature. We are coming full circle in our ending of the story of Ruth, as she becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Through the wisdom and cunning of her mother-in-law Naomi, Ruth finds her way to Boaz on the threshing floor in the night, and through his cunning and wisdom (in the verses not included in this selection), he clears the way for Ruth to become his wife. Ruth, an outsider, a Moabite, becomes an important figure in the history of Israel.

In our second thread following the Prophets, Elijah brings hope to the widow at Zarephath, who is preparing to die from starvation with her son. Elijah promises her that if she shares out of the little that she has, God will provide, and it is so: the jars containing the meal and the oil do not run out, and she is able to provide for herself and her household until the drought ends.

Psalm 127 is a reminder that all things come from God, and that God is the one who ultimately provides for us. The poet writes that our worry and anxious work do not gain anything, but trusting in God gives us rest. The psalm goes on to speak of the blessings of children, especially sons, in a time when family survival depended upon inheritance passing from fathers to sons and for sons to help defend the homeland.

Psalm 146 was a choice last week in the Revised Common Lectionary. Fitting for the season of Thanksgiving, we are reminded to sing praise to God, the one we should put our trust in. Earthly princes will fail us, but God is the one who reigns forever. God is the one who frees the prisoners and hears the cries of the oppressed. God is the God of justice. God, who created the universe, also hears the cries of the lost and the least—the poor, the widow and the orphans, and will bring them justice.

Our second to last reading from Hebrews in this season reflects on not only Christ’s role as the priest who intercedes for us once for all, but also as the one who will return—no longer to deal with sin, but to welcome into the heavenly reign those who have been waiting. The power of sin died with Christ, and no longer has a hold on us, along with death.

Jesus teaches us to beware of those who claim to be religious in Mark 12:38-44. All too often, those who claim to be religious use it as a way to gain social status; those who live righteously often are the ones who serve others, who are not noticed, who are like the poor widow who gives all she has to live on. How we live our lives with what we have is more important than our claims about our faith or religiosity.

The Narrative Lectionary tells the story of the prophet Elijah, the prophet of the Lord God, verses the prophets of Baal. The people of Israel have begun to worship Baal and other gods of the surrounding peoples, but some have remained faithful to the Lord God. Many, however, are caught in the middle, confused. While the prophets of Baal sacrifice a bull to Baal and even harm themselves by cutting themselves, but no fire consumes the sacrifice. Elijah restores the altar to God that had been destroyed; then calls upon the people to poor water over the wood three times; but when Elijah prays, God sends down a fire that consumes the sacrifice and altar, and the people believe and worship God.

The Gospel portion from the Narrative Lectionary recalls the Transfiguration, when Jesus went up the mountain with three disciples, and as he was transfigured, both Moses and Elijah appeared to him. While we often remember the names of Daniel and Micah, Jeremiah and Isaiah, Elijah is the one who is seen as the forerunner to the Messiah, and next to Moses the most important prophet. Elijah served God during the most trying times of the kingdoms, when the prophets of God were persecuted.

How are we faithful with what we have been given? How are we faithful with our lives? Do we trust in worldly wealth and riches, or do we trust in God? Can we be like Ruth, trusting the wisdom of Naomi, trusting that in the end, things will work out? In times of trial, like the widow of Zarephath, can we trust the wisdom of others that God will see us through? Can we trust God, in all these years, that Christ will come again into our lives and world in a new way? Can we trust that God will hear our prayers when the world tells us no? Can we be faithful to God, so that others will put their trust in God?

Call to Worship

The floods may come, the droughts may last;

**God’s faithfulness endures forever.**

Scarcity causes us to lock down in fear;

**God’s abundance opens the doors to freedom.**

Leaders will fall and fail us;

**God’s wisdom guides us into new life.**

Come, worship God, who is trustworthy and faithful;

**Give honor, praise, and glory to God in this time of worship.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we have failed to trust in You. We have put our faith in the stock market, our hope in politicians, and have followed the false wisdom of worldly success and wealth. We have failed to seek Your wisdom by putting ourselves above others. We have failed to follow Jesus Christ in failing to love our neighbors as ourselves. Forgive us for our foolishness. Forgive us for being caught up in politics instead of the needs of people. Forgive us for looking to our own interests, putting our own security and comfort above others, and call us into Your ways of justice, mercy, and service. In the name of Christ, who gave up his life so we might live, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Trust that God is giving you a new start. Hope that you will have another opportunity to share God’s love by serving those in need. Put your faith in God’s promise to begin something new. Because all of this has already happened, and will happen again and again. You are forgiven now, and will be forgiven again. Turn back to God. Forgive others as you have been forgiven; go forth, and love and serve in the name of Christ Jesus.

Prayer

Great is Thy Faithfulness, O God. We give You our praise and glory, honor and thanksgiving, because we know Your love endures forever. We know that Your promises remain true. We know Your steadfast love never ceases. In our times of unsteadiness, in our times of trial, in our times of hopelessness—may we be open to Your love through the grace and kindness of others. May we be open to hope by the faithfulness of friends and caring strangers. May we trust in You because of the faithfulness of the community of faith. Call us to do the same for others, so that our faith may endure all the trials we face. In the name of Christ, whose courage in facing the cross gives us hope and renewed strength, we pray. Amen.