Worship Resources for November 9th, 2014—Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Joshua 23:1-3a, 14-25 or Amos 5:18-24; Psalm 70 or Psalm 78:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:1-13

Narrative Lectionary: Micah 5:2-4, 6:6-8; (Matthew 9:13)

As we wind down the season, we are nearing the end of the journey of our ancestors, from the call of Abraham and Sarah to the people’s entry into the Promised Land. Before they enter to settle the land, Joshua asks the people to consider what god they will serve—whether the gods of the land they are now in, or the God who has been with them since the call of Abraham. Choose this day who you will serve. Joshua proclaims to all of his people that he and his household will serve the Lord, the one who brought them up out of Egypt, from slavery into freedom. Joshua challenges the people, that if they truly serve God, they must get rid of the household gods among them, and not worship the gods of the land they are in. If they choose God, they must be faithful to God since God has been faithful to them.

Our second thread through the prophets contains Amos’ warning to the people who cry out for God’s judgment and wrath, for the Day of the Lord. Amos asks them why they would want it to come? The Day of the Lord is not what they think it will be—the people want to see their enemies punished for their wrongdoings, but Amos knows that God will judge all people, not just their enemies. Instead, Amos calls upon the people to live justly now. God does not desire festivals and sacrifices the way other gods do. God cannot be appeased. Rather, God’s wrath and judgment are turned away when we start living the way we are supposed to—when we start seeking justice for the oppressed and lift up the poor and bring in the marginalized. When we live out God’s ways of justice, there is no need for judgment.

Psalm 70 is a plea for God to help the psalmist, to deliver them from their enemies. The psalmist seeks God’s deliverance and asks for those who love God to rejoice in God’s salvation and for those who seek harm to be put to shame. The psalmist ends by pleading for God to not delay in deliverance.

Psalm 78:1-7 begins prophetically, that the psalmist is telling a parable, sharing wisdom from days long gone. The psalmist is connecting with their ancient roots and their ancestors, and bringing this wisdom back to the forefront, telling the stories of the ancestors and their faith in God to their children, so that future generations will know the goodness, mercy, and steadfast love of their God. Their God is the God of their ancestors, and the God of their children and future generations.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 encourages the church in Thessalonica that the dead will be raised, at the last trumpet sound. This thought is also shared by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, that not all will die, but those who have died will be raised, and those that remain will meet with them again, and all will be at home with God. One day, this dividing line of death will no longer exist. The dead will be raised, and because Christ died and has risen, so we, too, have died and have risen with Christ.

Matthew 25:1-13 is the first of three passages in Matthew 25 that we will read as we near the end of this season after Pentecost. As we prepare for Reign of Christ Sunday, we read this parable of the bridesmaids and the ones who prepared, along with the ones who did not. The ones who were prepared had enough oil to last when the bridegroom was delayed, but the ones who were not prepared ran out of oil, and when they went out to buy more oil, they missed the bridegroom and got locked out of the wedding. Delaying what ought to have been done now, putting off what needs attending to now—the foolish ones were not thinking about their responsibility at the time, they were only thinking of what they needed in that moment. In our faith walk, we can become concerned about ourselves and not about God, putting ourselves first instead of others—and when we realize it, it might be too late, and we have missed an opportunity to serve Christ.

The Narrative Lectionary has two passages from Micah—the first is a prophecy about the hope for a king that will come in the line of David, out of Bethlehem, the city of David, a ruler from ancient days. The second passage reminds us, like Amos, that the prophets understood God to be one who did not require sacrifice and festivals and groveling, but called for justice, loving-kindness, and walking humbly with God.

Matthew 9:13 contains Jesus’ own echo of the prophets, when he tells those questioning him to go and learn what it means when God says “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” Jesus is concerned about the way we live our lives, and desires for us to change our lives for God, not to change what we think about God to suit our way of life.

God calls upon us to change our ways, to live in God’s ways of justice and peace now. All too often as people of faith we have put our emphasis on life after death, when God is quite concerned with our lives now, and we ought to be concerned with the well-being of all around us, alive with us, right now. How do we live out God’s ways now? Are we concerned about right worship and saying the right thing, or are we concerned about how we reach out to the poor, the oppressed and the marginalized, the ones the prophets and Jesus had great concern about? Do we serve the gods of the world around us—gods of success, wealth and fame, or do we serve the God of our ancestors, who calls us to seek mercy and justice, to walk humbly with God?

Call to Worship

Turn away from the distractions of the world!

**Open your heart to Jesus Christ.**

Slow down from the busy-ness of the world around us!

**Tune in to the savoring pace of God, whose time is eternal.**

Be still, and know that God is with you, right now.

**May we open our hearts and minds to worship our God.**

**May we know that God is with us in this moment. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Resurrection and New Life, forgive us when we focus too much on the things of this world instead of the lives in this world. Forgive us when we put all of our hope in life after death and ignore our opportunity to be living hope in the world now. Forgive us when we water down our faith to a belief in afterlife, rather than a call for justice and reconciliation in our lives now. Forgive us, most of all, for mistaking Your promise of eternity with just a place we go after we die. Help us to remember that eternal life, new life, begins now, and that we have participated in Your death and resurrection, and are called to live in Your ways of justice, peace, and love. In the Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

In Christ we have the promise of new life now. In Christ we have the resurrection. In Christ we have eternity. In Christ we have the opportunity, time and time again, to seek forgiveness, to be reconciled, to show mercy, and to love unconditionally. Know that you are loved and forgiven, and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, we call upon You to help us to remember. You are the God of our ancestors, who followed You away from the familiar lands of their family to a new home in a strange place. Help us to remember their stories of survival and hope despite all the odds against them. Help us to remember their mistakes, their misjudgments, so that we might learn and create a new future for ourselves. Guide us in the lessons we teach our children, to hold on to Your ways of justice, mercy and love, and to let go of violence and selfish gain. In the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.