Worship Resources for February 12, 2017—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

Narrative Lectionary: Luke 7:18-35 (Psalm 146:5-10)

In Moses’ final discourse, he lays before the people who are close to entering the land promised to them by God the choices they have. If they choose the way of God, to follow God’s commandments and ordinances and to live the life God desires, they will know the blessings of God. But if they choose their own way, and turn to other gods, they won’t make it long in their new land. Moses implores the people to choose life, so that not only will they live, but their descendants will live and thrive in their new homeland.

Psalm 119:1-8 praises those who walk in the way of God, and the psalmist longs to keep to God’s ways. The psalmist praises God for God’s teachings and precepts, but also calls upon God to not leave them, to not forsake them, but to stay close, so they can continue to learn the ordinances and statutes and praise God.

We continue our reading of Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, in which Paul declares that he can’t talk to them on a spiritual level because they are still acting in a very human way, acting like children, arguing among themselves about which teacher they follow, for they are all servants of God, and it doesn’t matter which teacher planted the seeds, for it is God that does all the work to help them grow.

In this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 5:21-37, Jesus lists several sayings, using the formula, “You have heard that it was said… but I say to you…” This builds off of last week’s passage, in being consistent in how we live out the law. They are not simply a list of rules, but rather a way of life. Jesus came not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it, to remind us all God created the law to be a way of life, and when Jesus rightly sums up the law later in the commandments to love God and to love our neighbor, he is not undoing what was handed down by Moses, but rather confirming it as our way of life.

John the Baptist questions Jesus in The Narrative Lectionary reading of Luke 7:18-35, wondering if Jesus was the one he was supposed to wait for. We don’t know what made John begin to question or doubt, but it could be that Jesus didn’t seem to be the kind of Messiah John, or others, were expecting. Jesus answered him that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the dead were raised. What else did John expect? But then Jesus turns to the people who are with him and asked what they expected to see in John as a prophet. They already have turned away from John’s message, so they, too, will turn from Jesus, but both John and Jesus will be known by how they lived their life in fulfillment of God’s ways.

Psalm 146:5-10 declares that those who put their hope and trust in God will be happy, will know the blessings of God. God is the one who carries out justice for the oppressed, feeds the hungry and opens the eyes of those who cannot see, and watches out for the foreigners, the refugees, the orphans and the widows. This is the God we put our trust in, the God who made the world and the heavens and watches out for the most vulnerable among us.

God has shown us how to live. But we have made God’s ways, taught to us by the prophets long ago and lived in the life of Jesus, into another set of rules. Paul warns us away from idolization, whether it be of teachers or of rules, but we fail again and again. We have turned religion from a way of life, a spiritual path, into a hard and fast set of rules. Jesus teaches that it is how we live out our faith that shows our consistency, our devotion and love for God, and love for our neighbors.

Call to Worship

You have heard it said, “Follow these rules to get to heaven.”

 **But Jesus says to us, “Love your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.”**

You have heard it said, “Don’t murder, hate, or steal.”

 **But Jesus says to us, “Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

You have heard it said, “Don’t swear falsely.”

 **But Jesus says to us, “Don’t swear at all, but tell the truth always.”**

Jesus came to show us God’s ways of love:

 **Come, worship Jesus, who leads us into life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Living God, You have shown us the way of life through Christ Jesus. But we have added yokes difficult to carry and burdens great to bear. We have made the Way You taught us into a list of rules to obey, and turned away from Your free gift of Love and created a monster of wrath to fear. Forgive us, for putting You in a box. Forgive us for telling others that inside the box is a monster. Forgive us for causing fear and harm to others, instead of revealing the truth: Your love is free through Christ Jesus our Lord. Call us to turn back to Your way of love, to seek the well-being of our neighbors, and to truly love them as ourselves, so we may love You more fully. In the name of Christ, who has shown us the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The Way is Christ Jesus our Lord. Know Jesus, and you know life. Know Jesus, and you know love. Go, and live out the life God desires for you, loving your neighbor as yourself, forgiving your neighbor as you are forgiven, and serve others as Christ has served us. Go, live into God’s way, for it leads to life. Amen.

Prayer

Sweet Lord Jesus, help us to bring back the sweetness into this world that has been carved with cruelty and destruction. Help us to mend the wounds we have inflicted on others and ourselves. Call us with compassion to see others as Your children, as our kindred, and that all have the possibility of repentance, redemption, forgiveness and healing, for nothing is impossible for You. But Sweet Lord Jesus, we are hurt, we are angry, and we are tired. Bitterness comes to our mouth and it is hard to swallow. Help us to find Your goodness in others and in the world, and help us to make the world sweet again, as You intended. Amen.