Worship Resources for February 24th, 2019—Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 45:3-11, 15; Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40; 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50; Luke 6:27-38

Narrative Lectionary: Feeding 5000, Matthew 14:13-33 (Psalm 95:1-5)

The Hebrew Scripture reading takes us to near the end of Genesis, near the end of the saga of Jacob and his family, when Joseph reveals he is alive to his brothers, the very ones who sold him into slavery. Joseph doesn’t hold a grudge against his brothers; instead, Joseph sees that God was with him throughout his ordeal, and he has come through by the grace of God. In his own interpretation, he sees God at work in all he went through so that one day he could save his family. God has used what was intended against him as evil for good.

In Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40, the psalmist gives advice to trust in God and not to take the advice of those who do evil. Those who commit themselves to God will find that God is committed to them and will act on their behalf. The psalmist advises to resist anger and wrath, and instead leave vindication for God. The wicked will not last, and the meek shall inherit the land. The righteous find their salvation in God, who is the deliverer, the one in whom the faithful find refuge.

Paul completes his argument about resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50. Paul speaks of bodily resurrection, of how a seed must die in order to come to life. “What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.” Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom, so what is raised is spiritual, eternal. If we have a physical body, we also have a spiritual body, Paul argues. We bear the image of Christ; therefore, we will be raised with Christ.

Jesus continues his “sermon on the plain” in Luke’s account, in 6:27-38. Jesus teaches his disciples that they must love their enemies and pray for those that persecute them, and faithfully, but nonviolently, resist those that would cause them harm. Do unto others as others do unto you. If you love only those who love you, then you’re no better than anyone else because we all love those who love us—but for those who love all, who do what good they can—theirs is the reign of God. What you give is what you will receive.

The Narrative Lectionary follows Matthew’s account and the Feeding of the Five Thousand. Jesus had withdrawn to be by himself in a boat, but the crowds heard where he was and went to find him. When he came ashore, he had compassion for them, and healed those who were sick. But when night came, the disciples urged him to send the crowds away so they could go buy dinner. Jesus tells them, “Don’t send them away—you give them something to eat.” The disciples reply that they only have five loaves and two fish, but Jesus takes them, blesses and breaks the loaves, and feeds the crowds. They all ate, were filled, and had baskets of leftovers. And the five thousand, of course, didn’t count the women and children who were also there. After this, Jesus sends the disciples out in the boat, while he goes to be by himself up the mountain. When he returns, they think he’s a ghost, walking on the water. But he tells them, “It’s me, don’t be afraid.” Peter questions him, “if you’re a ghost, tell me to get out of the boat,” and Jesus calls to him. Peter walks out, but then becomes afraid of the wind, and begins to sink, until Jesus stretches out his hand and saves him. “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” he asks Peter. And then, they all worshipped him.

The psalmist praises God in Psalm 95, the king above all gods. The psalmist calls upon the people to worship and give thanksgiving to God, who made all the earth, including the mountains and the sea.

Some of the teachings of Jesus are quite hard to hear, especially for those who are victims of abuse and other forms of violence. Jesus teaches us to not physically resist an evildoer, but only in the sense that we not become violent and abusive ourselves. Jesus calls us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us in the hope that they will be transformed by love. Turning the other cheek and giving up our shirt were, according to theologian Walter Wink, acts of resistance that would have shamed the other person in first century Jewish culture. This is not a passive letting your enemies walk all over you, but an active way of resisting evil. Loving others requires that we still see humanity in others when they refuse to see it in us.

Call to Worship

Rise above the ways of the world:

**We are called to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.**

Rise above the ways of the world:

**We are called to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.**

Rise above the ways of the world:

**We are called to do unto others as we would have them do unto us.**

Rise above the ways of the world:

**We are called to live into the ways of Jesus.**

**Come, let us worship Christ, and follow him.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we wander from the truth, and fashion our own version that suits us. We create our own stories that center our experience, sometimes over the experiences of those who are oppressed and marginalized. We confess that often in our stories we are the heroes, we are the ones who have overcome hardship and struggles. Forgive us, for You died for us. Forgive us, for we ought to be last of all, servant of all, seeing the humanity in all. Forgive us, for the truth is there is always justice needing to be done. Always peace to be waged. Always love to be shared. Always forgiveness to be given. Forgive us, for the work is not done, and the truth is we are not the hero, but we are at best the ones who support You in the work of love and justice, that You continue to do on earth as it is in heaven. Call us to Your truth. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are God’s beloved child. You are important to God’s story, and God needs you. You are forgiven and loved. Go now, continue to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Forgive as you are forgiven, love as you are loved, and know that God is with you, always. Amen.

Prayer

Author of Life, may Your words continue to inspire us and guide us. May we understand the stories of old with new insight. May we hear the songs and poems as if they are being sung in us. We trust in the words of the prophets to bring us insight into Your ways of justice. May the laws and statutes and ordinances remind us that You desire us to be a people who practice justice and loving-kindness. We trust in the words of Jesus to lead us into life, the teachings of the apostles to shape our communities, and the revelations of Scripture to reveal Your mysteries in new ways. Author of Life, we know You are continuing to write our stories, woven together into the great mystery of creation, and we trust You in the process that one day we may understand a glimpse of all You have given us. Amen.