Worship for June 16th, 2013—Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Father’s Day

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Kings 21:1-21a or 2 Samuel 11:26-12:10, 13-15; Psalm 5:1-8 or Psalm 32; Luke 7:36-8:3; Galatians 2:15-21

In our first thread for the Hebrew Scriptures, we are following the stories of prophets who spoke unpopular messages, standing up for God’s ways against unjust leaders. King Ahab was a king who wanted to have what others had; Jezebel, his queen, was not from Israel and worshipped other gods. In this passage, Ahab wants Naboth’s vineyard but Naboth refuses to give it to him. Jezebel has him killed so that Ahab will receive the vineyard. Elijah is told by God to go and proclaim to Ahab that disaster will befall him because of what he has done, because he has “sold” himself “to do what is evil in the sight of the Lord” (vs. 20). God hears the cries of the innocent, the cries against injustice, and the prophets spoke these proclamations of God in very difficult circumstances—against the very threat of their own lives being taken by these unjust rulers.

Our second thread follows a similar theme this week: in 2 Samuel, the prophet Nathan has some bad news to deliver to David because of David’s own selfish desires in having an affair with Bathsheba, but in addition, having her husband Uriah killed. Because of this, the prophet Nathan, through a parable, shares God’s judgment: David has brought violence upon himself and his family by his own act of violence. When we turn from God’s ways—when we seek what we desire over what we need, when we turn to worldly pleasures over God, when we believe that our way is the right way—we stumble and fall, and our punishment is the consequences of our own actions. Because of David’s sin of violence, violence never departed from his house.

Psalm 5:1-8 is a song seeking God in a time of great distress, asking for God’s deliverance and prayers of faithfulness, knowing that God is a God of justice, not of evil. God will stand with those who are persecuted, with those who are marginalized. The psalmist sings of their trust in God and God’s righteousness to endure.

Psalm 32 compliments the 2 Samuel reading as a psalm singing of thanksgiving for God’s forgiveness, and healing from illness. The psalmist has experienced sin like sickness, and the assurance of forgiveness rejuvenates them, energizes them, and they sing in joy. The psalmist urges the listener to be steadfast and turn to God in times of distress.

Luke 7:36-8:3 is a funny passage—funny in that we call into question the assumption by many scholars that Luke was favorable towards women. Only in Luke’s Gospel is the woman who anoints Jesus called a sinful woman. John names her as Mary of Mary and Martha, but here she is unnamed. Only in Luke is she described as having many sins (vs. 47). The beginning of chapter 8 lists several women not named in other Gospels—women who provided out of their resources for Jesus and the disciples. Sounds great, right? But again, only in Luke (save for the longer ending of Mark, which most scholars and Bibles mark as probably not original) is Mary Magdalene described as having seven demons. Mary Magdalene is not given any of those attributes in Matthew, Mark, and John. Yet still, these passages show how integral women were to Jesus’ ministry. So we read these passages carefully, and with suspicion, especially since it seems these women are given more of a background role compared to the disciples; but we are also grateful to Luke for giving us the names Joanna and Susanna, and their roles as financial providers in Jesus’ ministry. Jesus is revealed in this passage as the one who forgives sins, the sins of this woman and apparently of Mary Magdalene, though these sins are not included in other gospels.

Galatians 2:15-21 continues our journey into Paul’s argument to the church in Galatia, who had first received the Gospel of Jesus from Paul, but then since were influenced by the Judaizers of Jerusalem, pushing the laws and restrictions they practiced onto the Galatians. Paul argues that through Christ, both Jews and Gentiles are justified. The law is not necessary, it is faith that is necessary. Note: our English translations often translate the phrase “faith in Christ.” However, the King James Version translates the Greek a little more accurately, “faith *of* Christ.” The latter shows Christ’s faithfulness, even to death on a cross, and that through Christ’s faithfulness we are saved, not by anything we can do ourselves—not our own deeds, and not our own faith.

We all fall short—we all sin. We all follow the ways of this world and neglect those in need around us. We all can justify our actions, even our beliefs—and at times Christians are notorious for doing this. I’ve heard we can ignore the poor because Jesus said, “You’ll always have the poor with you.” I’ve heard we can hate others because God hates them. But if we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). We are all sinners, but we are all saved from sin by Jesus, because of his faithfulness to God, even to the point of death on the cross. Through the faith of Christ we are saved—this is not our own doing, this is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

For Father’s Day, we are reminded that no one has the perfect father. While some have wonderful relationships with fathers or stepfathers, others have had difficult, strained relationships, or no relationship at all. But there are some who have been father figures to us, and we remember how Jesus, in John’s Gospel, called God “Abba.” We remember that we are all children of God, and we are each other’s brothers and sisters in Christ.

Call to Worship

We gather to worship God in this space

 **For we are brothers and sisters in Christ.**

We gather to pray and praise, to reflect and wonder

 **We gather to remember our call to love one another as God loves us.**

We are part of the family of God

 **We are called to see each other as Christ sees us.**

Come, let us worship together

 **Let us worship God who loves us all!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we confess that we all have fallen short. We have all failed to live up to our potential, to love one another, to forgive one another. We have all given ourselves an out before—to not help one, to not care about another. Forgive us for cheating the faith, for cheating others, for cheating You. Forgive us when we hold others to standards so high we cannot achieve them ourselves. Remind us that You love us, enough to die for us, and that You are the one who renews us, forgives us, and gives us life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from 1 John 3:18-20, 23)

Children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. By this we will know that we are reassured in our hearts, for God is greater than our hearts. This is God’s commandment, that we should love one another, and by doing so, we know we are forgiven. Amen.

Prayer

Heavenly Father and Mother, Creator of us all, we are Your children. Call us into the body of Christ, the community of faith, by seeing the needs of those around us, but also sharing in each other’s gifts. Help us to lift up one another, to value what each other brings to the community, to celebrate our work together. Call us away from worldly ways of competition, of greed, of selfishness and jealousy. Gather us in, draw us together, that we might live more fully as the body of Christ here on earth. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Litany of Recognition and Honor for Father’s Day *(originally written in 2012)*

Leader: On this day we recognize our fathers and stepfathers, those who have nurtured and guided us in our lives.
**People: We thank You, O God, for those who have been fathers to us.**Leader: We honor our grandfathers, our uncles and brothers, those who have demonstrated love and care to us in our lives.
**People: We thank You, O God, for those who have been like fathers to us.**Leader: We appreciate our teachers, leaders and pastors, who have been both male and female, but we especially honor those who have extended fatherly tenderness and love in our lives in our past and present.
**People: We thank You, O God, for those who have fulfilled a fatherly role in our lives.**Leader: Loving God, You have been both Mother and Father to us. Abba, Father, we remember how Jesus called out to You on earth, recognizing that You are closer to us than our earthly parents. Your love and care for us are felt in the ways we are loved and cared for by others. We thank You for all the male figures in our lives who have shared Your love with us. We ask that You guide and nurture new fathers and fathers-to-be. We seek Your forgiveness for fathers who have fallen short, for models of fatherhood that were limiting rather than embracing, for that is not Your model. You are our ever-loving Parent, Father of us all. Grant Your wisdom to all fathers and fatherly figures to love their children as You have loved Your children.
**People: We thank You, O God, for fatherhood and motherhood, for the blessing of parents in our lives.**Leader: Abba, Father, we pray with those who are mourning the loss of fathers today, and for those whose fathers were absent or abusive. Ease their pain on this day, loving God. May they know Your embrace, and that You are more than Father or Mother to us–You are the all-loving, all-caring Parent, Creator of heaven and earth, who knows the hairs on our heads.
**People: We thank You, O God, that You are always with us, that You will never leave us or forsake us.**Leader: We thank You for this day, and ask that You bless all of Your children with Your love, as a wonderful father loves their child.
**All: Amen.**