Worship Resources for June 17, 2018—Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Father’s Day

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13 and Psalm 20; Ezekiel 17:22-24 and Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, (11-13), 14-17; Mark 4:26-34

Narrative Lectionary: Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:17 (Matthew 22:34-40)

In our first selection for the Hebrew Scriptures, we continue to follow the call of the kings. Saul has failed to live up to be the king the people hoped for, but God tells Samuel that it’s time to move on. God will choose a king from the sons of Jesse, and the one God chooses is not the strongest or the oldest, but the youngest who is off with the sheep, a handsome young boy; one no one suspected would be chosen.

Psalm 20 is a blessing before the battle, praising God. The psalmist calls for the people to praise God who answers their prayers, who gives the victory, and grants the desires of the faithful. The psalmist reminds the people not to take pride in their armies or weapons, but that it is God who gives the victory, God who is the king of kings.

In the second selection of the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Ezekiel speaks of justice in the metaphor of the sprig of a cedar tree. God will plant Israel like a sprig from a tree on a tall mountain, and God is the one who brings down the high trees and lifts up the low trees—in other words, God levels the trees, the playing field. In the sprig that God plants, all kinds of birds and winged creatures will find a home, even though it is only a sprig, only the beginning of what is to come.

Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15 is a song of praise to God. The psalmist compares the righteous, the faithful as being planted like cedar trees—strong and unbreakable. They flourish in God’s reign and continue to bear fruit their whole life. Those who remain faithful remain strong in God.

In 2 Corinthians 5:6-17, the writer (Paul, or one of his disciples) writes that we walk by faith. We try to persuade others, but it should be through the way we live our lives by faith. The love of Christ urges us forward, because we all have died with Christ. We no longer look at anyone with a human point of view, but through faith, we understand that everything has passed away and has become new in Christ.

Jesus tells two parables about seeds in Mark 4:26-34. The first is about planting seeds, and not understanding how or why they grow, but the planter knows when it’s time for harvest. We know when the grain is ripe. God knows when we are to be used. The second parable is that of a mustard seed, one of the smallest of seeds, but becomes an invasive plant that one can’t get rid of. Instead, it becomes one of the greatest of shrubs, and the birds build their nests there. Echoing back to Ezekiel’s parable, what takes root in the faithful cannot be undone, and it becomes the home of God.

The Narrative Lectionary concludes its four-part series on The Ten Commandments with the final verse, Exodus 20:17. This final verse is about wanting what others have. In many ways, this is the sin that leads to other sins. Cain wanted the blessing from God, but Abel’s sacrifice was accepted instead of his, and so he killed Abel. Wanting what others have leads to adultery, to stealing, to murder, to lying—to breaking the other commandments. Our desire for what others have is the root of much evil.

*(repeated from last week’s resources)* For the first four weeks after Pentecost, the second passage for the Narrative Lectionary is Jesus’ declaration of the greatest commandment: to love God with one’s whole being, and the second, which is like the first, is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus declares that on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Since only the Torah and the Prophets had been fully complied at this point as scripture, Jesus is saying this is the summary of the Bible as they know it.

God’s ways are not our ways. God chooses the smallest, the least. God chooses the sprig over the giant tree. God chooses the invasive weed over the beautiful flowering plant. God chooses us, and makes their home with us, and when we know and accept God’s choosing, the welcome is drawn wide for others and creation. God is the one who has planted the seeds in us, and knows when it is time for harvest, time for us to be used for the kingdom and to use all our gifts God has given us. The time is now.

Litany for Father’s Day

Thank you, God, for all those who have loved us dearly  
**For all parental figures in our lives that showed us Your love, we give thanks.**Thank you, God, for those who have stepped into the role when others were absent  
**For step-fathers and uncles, brothers and caregivers, teachers and coaches  
who made a difference in our lives, we give thanks.**Thank you, God, for our fathers and grandfathers  
**For all those who have mirrored Your love in our lives, we give thanks.**We lift up to you, O God, those fathers who have gone on  
**For those who are grieving, for those who feel an absence on this day, we pray.**We lift up to you, O God, all those who have had difficult relationships with their fathers  
**For those who were harmed by their fathers and others who should have loved them,  
we pray, and we cry out, and we seek justice.**

Loving God, You are the one Jesus called “Abba, Father.” Abba God, love us as Your children. Remind us that in You were are all Your family. You are our Mother and Father, and have loved us in ways no earthly parent could. We give You thanks for all the loving fathers and step-fathers, all those who have shown Your love to us the way You have loved Your Son, Jesus the Christ. May we all reflect Your image in the ways we love our children, and in how we love one another, knowing that our worldly families are not perfect, but Your love is.

**Abba God, we pray in Your name. Amen.**

Call to Worship

God is the sower, planting seeds;

**May the seeds God has planted grow and blossom in us!**

God is the gatherer at harvest-time;

**God sees our potential, and uses it for the Beloved Community.**

God is the one who encourages us to grow;

**God desires for us to build the reign of God on earth, as it is in heaven.**

Come, worship God, by living faithfully into God’s desires for us;

**Bear spiritual fruit, flourish in God’s love, and grow!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, Father, Mother, and Creator of us all, we confess that we have not lived into our potential. We have shied away from the gifts You have given us. We have thought ourselves too small or too weak. We have thought our resources too meager and the risk too great. Forgive us for not seeing ourselves the way You see us, as fully embodied vessels of Your love in this world, full of the Spirit. Renew in us Your Spirit of encouragement, wonder, and joy, and send us forth into this world that desperately needs Your love, peace, and justice. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God knows you. God knows everything about you. God made you in their image. God has filled your heart with good things, filled you with the Spirit. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, and God needs you in this world. Go, share the good news by loving your neighbor as yourselves. Amen.

Prayer

Gardening God, You planted a dream of Eden in our hearts, a place that we long for, where You walk among us, where we are who we are without shame or guilt. Help us to live into Your dream by loving one another, forgiving one another, and caring for this earth that You have given us. Plant within us the desire for justice and for mercy. Grow in us the fruit that bears peace and hope. Help us to remember we are interdependent in this world, and we need one another. May we forgive, may we be reconciled, and may we continue to grow in You. Amen.