Worship Resources for June 18, 2017—Second Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 18:1-15 (21:1-7) and Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; or Exodus 19:2-8a and Psalm 100; Romans 5:1-8; Matthew 9:35-10:8 (9-23)

Narrative Lectionary: Psalms, Psalm 13 (John 6:35-40)

In our first selection from the Hebrew Scriptures, in this season after Pentecost we follow the origins of the Hebrew people. Abraham, sitting in the shade of the entrance to his tent at the heat of the day, comes out into the hot sun to implore three strangers to stop and stay, to rest under the trees in the shade and have some water, and to eat. In Abraham and Sarah’s kindness to the three strangers, one of them tells Abraham that his wife Sarah will conceive and bear a son. Sarah, overhearing these words, laughs, because she is too old. But God promises that it will happen, and in the selection from chapter 21, Sarah indeed has her son, and names him Isaac, “laughter,” for the joke is on her: God knew, and God knows, and God has brought laughter into her life.

The psalmist responds to God’s mercy and grace in Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19. God has heard the prayers of the psalmist, and the psalmist offers prayers and a thanksgiving sacrifice, an offering showing devotion and thankfulness. The psalmist promises to fulfill their vows in the presence of the people, so the people can see the faithfulness of God.

The second selection of the Hebrew Scriptures for the season after Pentecost follows the Prophets. Moses, called by God to lead the people out of Egypt and into the wilderness, speaks to the people on behalf of God. God tells the people through Moses that they have witnessed what God has done for them, and that they are a priestly people, chosen by God out of the whole earth that God has made. Moses reminds the people that God agrees to care for them in a special, specific way, if they agree to be God’s people, and they make their covenant with God.

Psalm 100 calls the people into worship as they enter the temple of God. The people are called to make a joyful noise, to proclaim God’s goodness. The psalmist reminds the people that God has made them, and that they belong to God, like sheep in the pasture of their caretaker.

Paul writes that we have hope in Christ in Romans 5:1-8. In a time when the church was threatened with persecution, Paul builds up hope, reminding the Romans that Christ suffered and died while they were still sinners. If they suffer for Christ, they can find hope because Christ did so for them. Paul isn’t justifying suffering, but that we can still find hope in our suffering because Christ died for us, and God’s love is found in the Holy Spirit that is now in us.

Jesus recognizes the scope of his ministry in our selection from Matthew. “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” From the beginning, it’s been an uphill climb to meet the needs of the people. Jesus has called the twelve disciples to share in the ministry. At first, this ministry is only to the Jewish people, their own people, to bring healing and cast out demons, and to proclaim that the reign of God is at hand. The passage continues in the longer selection with Jesus’ instructions to take nothing extra, for those that they help ought to help them (the laborers deserve to be paid). But it won’t be easy. They will be rejected, they will be ridiculed, and they will face persecution, but those who endure to the end will know the salvation of God.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series on the Psalms and selected passages from John’s Gospel account. Psalm 13 speaks to the anguish and despair the writer feels in that moment. The psalmist feels abandoned by God, and their enemies are closing in, and God seems to not notice. Yet the psalmist declares their trust in God’s steadfast love, and knows that in the end, God will prevail.

In John 6:35-40, Jesus declares that he is the bread of life, that those who come to him will never be hungry or thirsty. Anyone who comes to Jesus will never be driven away, and all that Jesus has from God he will share with those who come to him. In Jesus one can trust in God’s faithfulness and assurance.

We all have been in the position of the psalmist in psalm 13, doubting God’s goodness and assurance when we are going through our own trials. Paul speaks to this in Romans 5, but speaks boldly that hope does not disappoint us, for we have hope in Christ who was willing to die for us. Sometimes, following Jesus seems like an uphill climb—there is much to be done, and so few to do it, so few who remain faithful. But just like Abraham, sometimes it is in the act of hospitality that we receive the greater blessing, and find our hope and faith renewed. Even when we have little to give, when we share with others, we are blessed.

Call to Worship

As Abraham welcomed the three strangers passing by,

**So we welcome all into this space.**

As Christ declared that the kingdom of God belongs to children,

**We especially welcome all children of God into our lives.**

As God has welcomed us,

**We extend that welcome to all today.**

Welcome one another.

**Welcome! We are so glad to be together to worship our God today!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that we are not always at our best. We are tired and burned out. We wear down. We overextend ourselves. We sometimes are short-tempered, snapping at others easily. We allow anger to bubble up and explode rather than calmly responding. We confess that at times we are downright rude to others because we haven’t taken out time to rest and reconnect with you. Forgive us of our temper tantrums. Forgive us of our short-sightedness. Forgive us for conflating busyness with holiness. Call us back into Your rhythm of life, which calls for a day of rest, a Sabbath practice that honors You. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We are renewed by the Spirit of God when we take time out to rest and refresh. We are renewed by the Spirit of God when we study the Scriptures without distraction. We are renewed by the Spirit of God when we set aside time for prayer and reflection. We are renewed by the Spirit of God when we enjoy the beautiful earth that God has created for us, and spend time with family and friends who nourish us. Find time today, and each day, for God, and find your spirits renewed. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of All, create in us a new sense of purpose that rekindles our created intention: to be good stewards of this earth and its resources. Remind us of the call to extend hospitality as You have extended hospitality to us, by creating this beautiful home that we share with all of living creation. Create in us an understanding of welcome that includes rather than excludes, that builds bridges instead of walls, that plants and grows new life as You sow the seeds of new life in us, through Jesus Christ, who leads us into life. Amen.