Worship Resources for June 2nd—Second Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Kings 18:20-39 or 1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43; Psalm 96; Luke 7:1-10; Galatians 1:1-12

In this Season after Pentecost, we have two threads going for the Old Testament readings. This year, our first thread covers the Prophets, beginning with Elijah’s triumph over the priests of Baal. This is a wonderful dramatic story to tell from 1 Kings 18: the showdown between Elijah and the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal. It’s a story I remember from camp days, from Sunday school: a story of how one person in faith can stand up to a crowd. Of course, we read this through the eyes of the writer, but we see the priests of Baal as the oppressors, and Elijah as the victim who perseveres and is rewarded by his faith. Not only does God answer Elijah by consuming the offering that was drenched with water by fire, but the people turn their hearts back to God. And then in one bloody ending worthy of Hollywood, the prophets of Baal are all killed.

The stories of the prophets in this first Old Testament thread that we will read in this season are stories where the prophets themselves are persecuted as Elijah was, where their opinions are discounted, where they are seen as fools, where the people and the leaders don’t listen to them, but whose prophetic warnings and messages of hope stand the test of time.

Our second reading also comes from 1 Kings, but ten chapters earlier, and our second thread begins with Solomon’s prayer dedicating the temple to God. We are reminded that there is no other God like God, who makes a covenant with the people of Israel, and also desires to be in relationship with all the people of the earth. This temple will be a witness to the world and so when those outside Israel come and see it, they will hear of what God has done for Israel, and will desire to know God themselves. These passages in the second thread follow a theme of revealing who God is, through prayer, deed and word.

Psalm 96 is the psalm paired with both readings, though paired with the second Old Testament reading it stops at verse 9. The psalmist sings of God’s work among all people, all nations, that God is the God of gods, that all other gods are idols but this God is the Creator of heaven and earth. This God is the ruler of the earth and all that is in it: nature and human beings.

Luke 7:1-10 is the story of Jesus healing the Centurion’s servant. An outsider—a Roman—who hears about Jesus, sends messengers to come to Jesus and bring him to heal his servant. This is a Roman who has power and authority among both his own people and among the Jews, and shows such faith that he doesn’t even need Jesus to come all the way to him, but knows that Jesus can heal. The Centurion is a witness that Jesus’ message is not just for a select group, but for all—for the Centurion may have power and authority, but he is seeking healing for a slave, for someone who would be considered replaceable. The Centurion shows faith that is unlike what Jesus has experienced before—someone who believes based on what he has heard alone, not on his own experience.

Galatians 1:1-12 begins with Paul’s declaration that there is one Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and that the Galatians have been influenced by another gospel: the gospel of human approval. The Galatians, who had received Paul and his teachings before, are now being influenced by Jewish Christians who believed that one needed to become Jewish first before becoming Christian. Paul is concerned that the Galatians were so easily swayed by these Jewish Christians that they are now requiring the people of their community to be circumcised and keep kosher as well. They have missed the point: Jesus came for all, Jew and Gentile. It is not about customs and rituals that keep one separate, but about common faith.

Throughout these readings, we read of God who is a God of all people, but those who are faithful to God experience God more fully. In the fire on the altar, the prophets of Baal are revealed as crowd-pleasers, bowing to power and oppression, where Elijah is the faithful one who shows God’s faithfulness to the people. Solomon prays to God that others might see God’s glory in the dedication of the temple, even those outside of Israel. The psalmist sings of God being the God of all creation, the one true God. Jesus declares the faithfulness of the Centurion who is far off to be more powerful than the faith of those who travel with him. And Paul writes that the true Gospel is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, not the gospel of public approval. Faith: what does it mean to have faith? Can you stand up to the crowd? Can you trust in God’s faithfulness when troubles are coming your way? Can you stand firm, when others turn away?

Call to Worship

We are called to be witnesses of God’s love

Call us to love one another, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We are called to be witnesses of God’s justice

Let us stand with the oppressed and speak out for those in need.

We are called to be witnesses of God’s peace

Keep us to the path of peacemaking and to be bearers of peace in the world.

We are called to be witnesses of God.

Come, let us follow Jesus, who leads us into God’s ways of love, justice and peace. Amen!

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we come to You knowing that we fall short in living out Your commandments. We put ourselves first. We ignore the cries of the poor and downtrodden because they are inconvenient. We turn away from the news because it is too disturbing to hear the brokenness of the world. Forgive us for our selfish and foolish ways. Call us to live into this world as bearers of Your love, truth, and forgiveness. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is God. There is nothing we can do or say that can change the fact that God love us, God forgives us, and God offers us new life. We are called to do the same, because we know we aren’t perfect, but God loves us perfectly. Amen.

Prayer

God of grace, truth, and love, we see You at work all around us. We see You at work in the first responders who risk their own lives to save others. We see You at work in the arms that surround us, in the helping hands that reach out, in the friends who comfort us in silence when no words will speak the truth of what we have experienced. God, we are mourning in this time of struggle and disaster. We are questioning why so many bad things have happened. Help us to resist the easy answers and the dismissive excuses, and instead, help us to be the response of love, grace and peace in a world that seems broken and lost. In the name of Jesus, who brings us together, who binds us together, who continues to hold us together, we pray. Amen.