Worship Resources for June 23rd—Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Kings 19:1-15a or Isaiah 65:1-9; Psalm 42 and 43 or Psalm 22:19-28; Luke 8:26-39; Galatians 3:23-39

We have backed up a couple of chapters in our first Hebrew Bible thread for this season after Pentecost, looking at the prophets who stood up for God’s ways of justice even when it wasn’t popular, even when their own life was at risk. Elijah, who has defeated the prophets of Baal, fears for his life because of Jezebel, and is now dejected and feeling helpless. I love this passage because Elijah is so human—so often when we are down and feel like “the world is against us” we are over-exaggerating. We know from the previous chapter that there were not only prophets of the Lord left (18:4) but that many Israelites turned back to God after the prophets of Baal were defeated. But Elijah says twice to God, in vs. 10 and 14, that he has been “very zealous for the Lord,” and that he alone is left. He’s right and everyone else is wrong and is against him. Poor Elijah! We all have felt that way. God continues to encourage Elijah, and reminds him he is not alone, even in the sound of sheer silence.

Isaiah 65:1-9 follows the second thread in our Hebrew Scriptures on God’s fulfillment of the covenant, God’s promises being renewed. Even though Israel will continue to fail, to fall away and to forget God, God will not forget them. Future generations, the descendants of Jacob, will continue to live in covenant with God as God promised. Even after the destruction, there will be times of blessing. The people will suffer the consequences of their own actions—their own turning away from God and turning to other earthly fulfillments will backfire on themselves—but God still is there, and God will welcome those who return.

Psalm 42-43 is a song of longing for God (Psalm 43 is just a continuation of Psalm 42). When we are like Elijah, feeling alone and dejected, we long to be remembered, we long to be vindicated, we long to be upheld. But our longing ought to be for God, not for worldly recognition. This psalm conveys that deep desire to be close to God, the source of Living Water (John 4). Even when evil closes in, when the days are dark, we remember the light, the source of our salvation, and that our hope is in God.

Psalm 22:19-28 prays for God’s deliverance quickly, but also reminds the listener that God is the one who rules, God is the one who cares for all, especially the poor and the marginalized, and God will bring deliverance.

Luke 8:26-39 tells of the healing of the Gerasene Demoniac. This passage is hard for us to read today, but we need to recognize that in the first-century Mediterranean world, much that was unexplainable was explained by using spiritual terms. What we do know is that Jesus confronted the demons of his day and healed people afflicted by them, including this man from Gerasene. And in a strange twist, the demons beg to be cast into a heard of pigs instead of “going back into the abyss” (vs. 31). But they enter the pigs and run over a steep bank into a lake and are drowned. This whole encounter with the demons is hard to understand for us, so far removed from a culture where demons were acknowledged and everything from addiction to illness and unexplained phenomenon were explained by demons. But what we do know is that Jesus healed this man, that his man was able to converse with Jesus afterwards “in his right mind” and with clothes on (vs. 35). As a mom of a child with autism, it reminds me of those moments when my son actually looks me in the eye and seems to recognize that we are conversing, if only for a moment. This man desires to follow Jesus, but Jesus tells him to go to his own home and declare with God has done for him (vs. 39). Instead of following Jesus as part of the entourage, telling others about what this Jesus had done, Jesus tells the man to go back home, but also points to what God has done. Jesus never sought attention and recognition for himself, but rather chose to point to what God was doing right in people’s lives. Sometimes in the mainline tradition, we lose sight of this. We talk theology, we discuss the teachings of Jesus, but we forget to share the Good News of what God is doing right in our very lives.

Galatians 3:23-29 is the famous climax of Paul’s argument: there is no difference when it comes to who we are as God’s children. There is no Jew or Greek. There is no slave or free. There is no male or female. There is no old or young. There is no gay or straight. There is no normal or not normal. There is no disabled and abled. But all of us are one. It does not mean we are all the same, but rather our differences are who make each of us unique, and in Christ, we are one body (1 Corinthians 12). We are one in Christ Jesus, we are God’s children.

Where is God? God is at work among us. God is at work among the people we don’t even know are there for us. God is at work in the restoration that will happen after the destruction. God is at work in our very lives. God is at work in us as a community, for we are the body of Christ. But we are the ones who put up barriers, who raise up walls, who divide and declare who is inside and who is out. We are the ones who do the damage, who divide the body. But Christ is at work in all of us, if we can remember that we are the body of Christ.

Call to Worship (adapted from Galatians 3:26, 28)

In Christ Jesus we are all children of God through faith:

**There is no longer Jew or Greek**

There is no longer slave or free

**There is no longer male and female**

There is no longer old or young

**There is no longer gay and straight**

There is no longer black or white

**There is no longer poor and rich**

There is no longer abled and disabled

**For all of us are one in Christ Jesus**

Come, let us worship our God, who makes us one!

**Let us worship Christ, for we are Christ’s body on earth!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, we confess that we are broken as a people. We have built up dividing walls and dug trenches. We have drawn lines in the sand and have not allowed others to cross. We have kept some people in, but kept many more out. Forgive us for our dividing ways, loving God. Heal us from our wounds of division. Comfort us when we have been left out. Call us into accountability when we have been the ones who have pushed out others. Lead us into the margins, across the boundaries, out of our comfort zones, to be the body of Christ in this world. It is in Christ’s name that we pray, who became broken for us, so that we might be made whole. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

You are a beloved child of God. There is nothing you can do, no place you can go, where God cannot find you, comfort you, heal you, and love you. God loves you, and desires the fullness of life for you. Go and live into God’s forgiveness, restoration and love. Amen.

Prayer

Steadfast God, we go through times when we feel alone, when we feel like the world is against us, when we feel there is no one on our side. You are always there, our Advocate and Redeemer, our Rock and Strength. Bring us comfort when we feel despair. Remind us of your presence when we feel alone. Comfort us when we feel wounded by the actions of others. Help us to live into Your hope, knowing that You are at work in all around us, and especially through the love and care of others. In the name of Jesus, who showed us Your compassion, mercy and love, we pray. Amen.