Worship Resources for June 25, 2017—Third Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 21:8-21 and Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; or Jeremiah 20:7-13 and Psalm 69:7-18; Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

Narrative Lectionary: Psalms, Psalm 23 (John 10:1-4)

We continue learning about the origins of God’s People in Genesis, with the story of Hagar and Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham’s son by Hagar and brother to Isaac, but because of Sarah’s jealousy, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael away with nothing but a little water and bread. God hears the boy’s cries, and speaks to Hagar through an angel (messenger), that God has not forgotten her or the boy. God’s promise through Abraham is also lived through Ishmael.

The psalmist pleads for God’s aid in Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17. The psalmist is despairing, seeking God’s ear to listen and for God to lift them up out of their desperate state. Verses 16-17 call upon God’s deliverance as they recall how God heard the voice of Hagar, the servant-girl of Sarah, and heard the voice of the boy crying out. The psalmist identifies with Ishmael and Hagar, and knows that God will hear them.

Our second selection from the Hebrew Scriptures follow the prophets. The prophet Jeremiah laments in 20:7-13 of his calling, because every time he opens his mouth and speaks what God has told him to, the people laugh at him. If Jeremiah tries not to speak, it is as if the words are on fire within him—he must speak. But even his friends have turned against him. However, Jeremiah knows that God is like a mighty warrior and Jeremiah’s enemies will fall, that they will not prevail. Jeremiah hopes for the day when he is vindicated, justified, and calls upon the listener to sing praise to God, who delivers the needy from the hands of evildoers.

The psalmist echoes the pain of Jeremiah in Psalm 69:7-18, knowing what it is like to speak for God when it is not popular. The psalmist also feels, like Jeremiah, that they cannot not speak for God—they can’t hold it in. They must speak, even when it pains them to do so. The psalmist trusts in God, and calls upon God to answer them and deliver them from their enemies.

Paul declares that we are dead to sin and alive in Christ in Romans 6:1b-11. We are baptized into Christ’s death—we die with Christ, and put to death sin in our lives. If we die with Christ, we rise and live with him, and sin no longer has a hold on us.

Jesus teachers the disciples in Matthew 10:24-39. Jesus teaches them that they are not above him, but that they work to be like him. Jesus teaches the disciples to tell everyone what he has taught them, to proclaim it from the rooftops, and to not be afraid. Jesus knows they will face persecution, but also teaches them that they are important, precious to God. However, Jesus also knows that some will waiver, and for those who remain faithful, he is faithful, but he will denounce those who deny him. Jesus came not to bring a false peace, a peace that rests on turning an eye to injustice and trying to smooth things over. No—the peace Jesus brings comes at a cost, where family members will turn against each other, because if one loves Christ, they must live according to Christ’s ways. To take up one’s cross is to die to the ways of this world, and the ways of this world call for us to make false peace, rather than true peace with our neighbors.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series on the Psalms with Psalm 23, the most famous of the songs. Attributed to David, the psalm brings assurance and comfort of God’s presence, even in the midst of enemies and the shadow of death. God’s presence remains steadfast, and the one who remains faithful will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus speaks in John 10:1-4 of the Good Shepherd, who is also the gate, and the shepherd calls out to the sheep who hear his voice. The one who climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit, but the one who enters by the gate hears the shepherd calling his voice, and they follow him.

There is no peace without justice. False peace calls upon us to ignore the conflict and to keep things calm on the surface. True peace speaks the truth, and calls us to face up to the injustice we have caused, and to speak out against injustice in the world. False peace called upon Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael away, to keep the peace in the family with Sarah, but true peace was God’s blessing of Ishmael and Hagar by hearing Ishmael’s cries. False peace calls us to turn our eyes and ignore sin, but true peace calls us to put to death sin in our lives. False peace calls us to allow abusive behavior to continue, to allow injustice to go on, to be Christians in name only; true peace calls us to deny ourselves and take up the cross, to put to death sin in our own life and to work for justice in this world. True peace is found in the presence of God, the Good Shepherd, and can be found even in the presence of our enemies, when we stay true to God’s ways.

Call to Worship (from Romans 6:4-8; 11)

Just as Christ was raised from the dead,

**So we are called to walk in the newness of life.**

For if we have been united with Christ in a death like his,

**We are certainly united with Christ in a resurrection like his.**

Our old selves were crucified with him so sin might be destroyed,

**Sin no longer has a hold on us.**

We are free from sin,

**And alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Come, let us worship the living God,

**May we embrace this New Life!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that we have allowed sin to fester in our lives. We have ignored injustice that we benefit from. We have pretended not to hear the calls of the marginalized and the oppressed. We have turned inward and looked at only our own desires instead of the needs of others. Forgive us. Call us back to Your ways, to die to ourselves, to take up the cross and follow You. In doing so, we live for others, and in living for others, we live for You and find new life. In doing so, we love our neighbor as ourselves, and by loving our neighbor, we love You. Call us into the New Life that You have promised, and keep us to Your commandments. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

When we love others well, we love God. So learn to love others well, to see their wounds and listen to their cries. Don’t pass over them, or assure them that it isn’t so bad, but listen and hear. Look and see. Do what you can to bring justice, and in doing so, bring peace. Practice loving-kindness, and know God’s loving-kindness is with you. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient Artisan, create in us a new spirit, one that looks to create and live and love with others, rather than one that seeks to forge its own way. Carve in us a humble heart, with plenty of room to love all. Mold us into the vessels of love You intended us to be. Help us not to fall into the path of the world we created that places value on productivity, but rather into Your path that places value on love and life. May we remember Your created intention in our image, and work to be co-creators with You, molded and shaped to love one another. Amen.