Worship Resources for June 26, 2016—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21 or 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalm 16 or Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

Narrative Lectionary: Generosity, 2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Both choices from the Hebrew Scriptures are about the passing on the prophetic torch from Elijah to Elisha, and God’s call to continue to speak through the prophets. In our first selection, we continue the passage from last week, in which Elijah was dejected after the showdown with the prophets of Baal and the news that the king and queen were after his own life. Elijah’s spirt has been renewed by God through the call to anoint new kings, and to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place. It is time for something new—for new reigns of kings, and for the word of God to be brought new again. Elijah covers Elisha with his mantle, symbolic that he is now the one called upon by God. But Elisha hesitates, wanting to say goodbye to his parents first. Elijah tells him to go home—it seems that Elisha is not ready. But Elisha offers a sacrifice, feeds the people, and then follows Elijah. It seems that Elisha’s sacrifice proves to Elijah that he is ready to do what it takes.

The second selection is from 2 Kings, when Elijah is ready to depart from Elisha. Elisha is not ready to let him go (much like not being ready to say goodbye to his parents in the first selection). Elisha refuses to leave Elijah alone, twice he tells Elijah he will not leave him. Elijah finally asks Elisha what it is he can do for him before God takes him up, and Elisha requests a double-portion of his spirit. Then Elijah is taken up in the whirlwind, but his mantle falls to earth, and Elisha takes it up. Elisha uses the mantle to strike and part the water, just as Elijah had done, and therefore knows that the spirit of God is in him.

Psalm 16 is a personal prayer of protection and guidance. The psalmist sings assurance of God’s presence, counsel and wisdom. For the one who chooses God, God will show them the way that leads to life, in which there is the fullness of joy.

Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20 recalls God’s faithfulness in leading the people through the waters, and how the water even fears God and obeys God, leading Moses and the people into safety. The psalmist cries aloud to God in their troubles, and is assured by God’s faithfulness to the people of Jacob through recalling the story of God leading the people out of Egypt through the Red Sea.

Paul continues his argument for unity in Galatians 5:1, 13-25, speaking of the fruit of the Spirit, of which there is no law against such things. If the Spirit dwells in those who believe in Christ, there is no need for the law, because those with the Spirit bear fruit. The ways of the world lead to short-lived self-satisfaction, but the ways of the Spirit lead to life.

In the first five verses of Luke 9:51-62, Jesus and the disciples enter a Samaritan village, but are not received. James and John (they are called the “Sons of Thunder” in Mark 3:17) get so worked up about this they want to call down fire to consume them. But Jesus turns and rebukes them. Jesus does not seem to be angry with the Samaritans rejecting him, but rather with the two disciples who feel they have to be right about it! In the second half, they head on to another village, and time and again people say they want to follow Jesus, but they are unwilling to leave behind the things that hold them back. But Jesus says that no one who looks back to the things of the world is fit for the reign of God.

The Narrative Lectionary concludes its series on 2 Corinthians with the theme of Generosity in 8:1-15. Encouraging the church in Corinth to be generous unites the cause to help others. In several places Paul encourages a collection for the Jerusalem church to aid those there, and this collection could be a unifying mission among all the early believers. With the church in Corinth having faced many divisions, having a common cause could bring unity. On top of that, generosity brings out the best in others, to share out of the gifts they have—not based on what they don’t have, but based on what they are able to give.

Following Jesus means leaving the ways of the world behind, and those ways include looking to our own gain and satisfying our own desires. But when we follow Jesus, we look to the well-being of others, and we recognize that we have not left the world behind as much as we have left behind what holds us back. We look to the world to satisfy our desires, but instead, we ought to look for ways of meeting the needs of the world. Placing need before desire encourages us to be generous, to live into the way of the Spirit, and to follow Jesus. The desire of the world is behind us; the need of the world is in front of us.

Call to Worship

The whole law is summed up in a single commandment,

**“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Live by the Spirit;

**For we are led by the Spirit into the world.**

We belong to Jesus;

**We do not belong to this world.**

Let us love and serve one another, as led by the Spirit;

**May we worship God, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the love of Jesus Christ.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Healing God, we call upon You to bind up our wounds, for the world has hurt us. We have been broken and fractured, hurt by the desires of the world to seek our own way and our own gains. Healing God, You have called us into the world to bind up the brokenhearted and to declare the Good News to the poor. Healing God, You have placed in our hearts the hope of Your Son, Jesus Christ, to go and share with glad and generous hearts. Call us away from the temptation of the world to satisfy our own desires and heal our own wounds. Call us instead to care for those in need, to lift up the downtrodden, and to work for justice; for in this work, Your healing has begun in us. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

You have bound us together, weaving our lives in patterns that cannot be broken. You have brought us together with the desire to follow You and to practice justice. You have led us to this place, in which we seek forgiveness for what we have done and work for the well-being of others. You have forgiven us, restored us, and set us back on Your path of life. God, send us into the world to share Your Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Crafter and Creator, Designer and Dreamer, call us into Your dream of how life should be, where Your children love one another and care for one another. Call us into Your design in which we are reminded always of our interconnectedness. Call us to listen to where You are speaking, to follow Your guidance, and to look to You, always at work in our world and in our lives, for You are always about to do something new in each of us. May we listen, may we love, and may we learn. Amen.