Worship Resources for June 30th—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Our first thread in the Old Testament readings speaks to the prophets who stood up for God’s justice, even when it was not popular, and their lives were at risk. We read today in 2 Kings of Elisha, following in the footsteps of Elijah. Elisha did not want to leave Elijah, but when Elijah is taken up into heaven, Elisha takes on Elijah’s mantle and steps into the same role that Elijah had: prophet of the Lord God, outspoken against the kings who had fallen away from worshipping God and had pillaged their own people.

In our second thread we follow the promises of God through God’s covenant with the people, and despite the people’s failings, God continues to renew the covenant in a new generation. The reading in 1 Kings this week compliments the reading from the first thread last week. Elijah is weary, feeling alone, and God has promised him he will not be alone. God is renewing the covenant by calling Elijah to anoint new kings and that God will save a remnant from those who have been condemned by their rejection of God. Further, God sends Elijah the prophet Elisha to be his disciple. Elijah, who in the previous passage had been complaining that he was alone, that he alone was zealous for God and all it had gotten him was persecution, now has a renewed sense of hope: God has not forgotten Elijah, and God has not forgotten the people.

Psalm 77 recalls God’s faithfulness through the stories of old: the Exodus from Egypt through the Red Sea, from slavery into freedom. It also recalls that God is the Creator, and that this God still leads the people into freedom.

Psalm 16 sings of choosing to follow God, and that those who choose other gods follow false paths, paths of self-satisfaction that are short lived. Those who follow God have “a goodly heritage” (vs.6) and can know that God will lead them into the path of life, the “fullness of joy” (vs. 11).

Luke 9:51-62 contains two stories of those who follow or want to follow Jesus. The first is about James and John, who were also called Boanerges, Sons of Thunder in Mark 3:17—they were known for their tempers! When the Samaritan village refuses to receive Jesus, they want to destroy the village with fire! But Jesus rebukes them. The villagers have made their choice, and Jesus has made his choice--“his face was set toward Jerusalem” (vs. 53). Samaritans worshipped God in Samaria, not Jerusalem. However, there is no punishment or coercion. In the second passage, there are those who want to follow Jesus but are held back by other commitments. Jesus warns them that the commitment to follow Jesus as a disciple is not one to be made lightly. In both of these passages, there is a choice about following Jesus, and a choice about how one reacts. James and John wanted to react violently to the rejection of Jesus (probably because they did not fully understand who Jesus was as the Messiah, nor did they understand their role as disciples—these same disciples are caught up in the argument about who is the greatest later on). Jesus, however, reacts very differently. He simply leaves the Samaritan village and moves on. For those who want to follow him half-heartedly, he simply tells them that they do not understand what they are seeking, how great the commitment is, how much the cost of following Jesus will be, with their very lives.

Galatians 5:1, 13-25 contains Paul’s argument that Christ has set all free, and that in that freedom the commandment is to love one another, to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. By setting rules for others (such as the Judaizers were doing to the Gentile believers) they were not showing love, and were causing strife and anguish. When we live by the Spirit, we develop the fruit of the Spirit and we live in love with one another, as Jesus called us to do.

We all have opportunities to make right choices in our lives. We remember from the psalmist that for those of us who choose to follow God will, in the long run we will live a fulfilling life in joy with God. We know that God keeps God’s end of the covenant, even when we go astray, even when we have willfully rejected God, God cannot reject us. It is our own rejecting of God that separates us, our own clinging to worldly ways and values that keeps us from following God’s ways of love and justice. It is this failure to leave worldly understandings that built up the walls between Jewish and Gentile believers in Paul’s day, and causes us to continue to keep walls and boundaries between others today. We are called to break down those walls by following Jesus, and we are called to leave those worldly values and understandings behind. The world behind me, the cross before me, no turning back, no turning back.

Call to Worship

We come from all walks of life

 **We come to worship God**

We come with burdens great, haunting pasts and unknown futures

 **We come to follow Jesus**

We come from a world of judgment and condemnation

 **We come into the freedom and liberation of Jesus**

We come to worship God

 **We come to follow our Savior together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator of the earth, We come before You knowing we have used Your creation to fulfill our desires. We have consumed more than we should just because we can, and because we have felt we deserve it. We have forgotten our relationship with creation as stewards, and we have lost our kinship with our brothers and sisters. We have become isolated and separated from one another, building up walls and drawing lines, turning away from loving our neighbors to enforce worldly values. Forgive us, O God, for not follow You and Your ways, but our own. Call us back to You, to Your commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to build up one another instead of building up walls. In the name of Christ, who calls us by name to follow Him, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

There is no turning back, once we have said yes and taken God’s hand to step forward. We are forgiven, we are loved, and we are called to continue on this journey of faith, knowing we are not alone. Come, join in the journey, receive forgiveness and share forgiveness with others. Amen.

Prayer

Author of Salvation, You have written us into the book of life. You have written us into Your story. Help us to continue Your work of love, forgiveness and reconciliation, so that we might tell Your story to those who have not heard, that we might include those who have felt rejected. Help us to read the threads woven into Your story that we have not seen or heard—stories of those who are different from us in culture and practice, those who speak different languages, those who have different families and abilities. Help us to learn and grow and to live out Your story of love for all. In Your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.