Worship Resources for June 9th—Third Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Kings 17:8-16 (17-24); Psalm 146 or Psalm 30; Luke 7:11-17; Galatians 1:11-24

Usually during the season after Pentecost we have two distinct choices for the first reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, but this Sunday they are from the same passage in chapter 17—you can do the first half, the second half, or both. Reading the entire passage, we hear the entire story of how God worked through the lives of the widow of Zarephath and her son, through life’s struggles and even through death. She is a foreigner, outside of Israel, who trusts in the faith that Elijah shares with her and survives. Even in her grief in the second passage, she still calls Elijah a “man of God,” though it is at the end that she declares, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth” (vs. 24). She now trusts in God and trusts Elijah because of Elijah’s actions. Elijah did not blame her, even when she assumed it was some past sin (vs 18) that caused her son to die. Elijah instead acted out of his faith, and witnessed God’s love that is beyond life and death, beyond the boundaries of culture and people, to her. Jesus, in Luke 4, mentions her in the context that God chose her through Elijah instead of the “many widows in Israel” (vs 25).

Psalm 146 sings of praise for God’s help, reminding us that our help is not in the leaders on this earth. We are not to put our trust into human hands, no matter how powerful in this world, but into God’s hands, for God is faithful to us. God is the one who is faithful to the oppressed, to the hungry, the poor, the widows and orphans. This is the God we follow and love—the one who is more faithful to all the people than we, or any earthly leader, can ever be.

Psalm 30 praises God in a more personal way, the God who heals, who delivers, who loves fearlessly and whose faithfulness knows no end. Though one may struggle at times, one can find God when they persevere. God will be the one who brings rejoicing in the end. God will be the one who brings healing in the end, even in life and death.

Luke 7:11-17 contains another story of a widow’s son who is raised from the dead. This story witnesses to God’s love in Jesus, but also witnesses to God’s compassion through Jesus Christ. When he sees her, Jesus has compassion for her and is moved to help. This act of compassion leads to others seeing Jesus as a great prophet when he raises her son from the dead. This story occurs right after Jesus healed the Centurion’s slave—another outsider—and shows that God’s love knows no bounds. This passage shows that God’s love knows not even the boundary of death.

Galatians 1:11-24 continues Paul’s discourse to the Galatians about the one true Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, that comes from God and not from human origins. For the Galatians had received the Good News from Paul, but then had been influenced by the Judaizers from Jerusalem that were calling for the new converts to go through the Jewish practices of circumcision and keeping kosher in order to follow Jesus. Paul declares that message is what they are proclaiming, but not what Jesus is proclaiming. In today’s passage, Paul is offering up proof that he is even more Jewish than the Judaizers, more zealous for God than any of them, but that Jesus has shown him a new way, and this Gospel he received directly from Christ.

The social and cultural boundaries we live in are of human origin. We are the ones who decide who is in and who is out. We are the ones who decide who is included and who is excluded. But when we recognize the power of God’s love, our own boundaries and borders fade away. God’s love was extended to the widow of Zarephath, beyond the social, cultural and political boundaries of Israel. God’s love is extended beyond the boundaries of the rich, the well-to-do, the healthy, and to the poor, the oppressed, the imprisoned, the hungry, the widows and orphans. God’s love is extended beyond the border of when we think all hope is lost—beyond life and death. God’s love is extended even beyond the very words of Scripture that we quote to prove God. God is bigger than our borders. God is bigger even than the Bible. God is much, much more beyond what we can imagine. It’s a failure on our part to try to limit the grace, love and compassion of God.

Call to Worship (from Matthew 5:45)

You are the children of God

 **We are called to love our neighbors and our enemies.**

You are the children of God

 **God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good.**

You are the children of God

 **God makes it rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

You are the children of God

 **God loves us all, and we ought to love one another.**

You are the children of God

 **God loves us even when we turn to evil. God forgives us, and God restores us.**

 **Come, let us worship our loving and forgiving God!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come to You knowing we have pushed our own boundaries on others. We have determined who was in and who was out, who is worthy and who is unworthy. Forgive us for our selfish ways, our pride and our self-righteousness. We know that we all have fallen short at one time or another. We confess that we have not lived up to Your love and grace as we should have. We reveal that we, too, have been broken and wounded, and are in need of healing and wholeness. Forgive us, restore us, and return us to Your path. In the name of Jesus, the great Reconciler, Healer and Friend, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Ephesians 2:10)

“For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” We are renewed, we are restored, and we are reconciled with Christ. Let us go forth and reconcile with one another. Amen.

Prayer

Architect of the Universe, You drew the boundaries for the seas upon the earth, and yet the seas at times overwhelm their boundaries. You lifted up the mountains, and at times the mountains crumble. We know that Your love knows no bounds. We know that there are no borders in which Your love cannot go, whether it be heaven or on earth or the farthest place imaginable, You are still there. Your Creative love cracks through the strongest boundaries. Your grace and mercy peel away the deepest layers. You overwhelm us and the world with Your love that grows beyond death into new life. Guide us on this journey of faith to be border-crossers, boundary-testers, and even at times, wall-breakers. In the name of Jesus, who gave his life to end the ultimate boundary of death, so that we might know his love eternally, we pray. Amen.