Worship Resources for July 12, 2015—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19 or Amos 7:7-15; Psalm 24 or Psalm 85:8-13; Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29

Narrative Lectionary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, Proverbs 1:1-7, 3:1-8; or Creeds, John 1:1-5, Luke 1:1-4

We continue in our thread in the Hebrew Scriptures following the rise of the Kings with David bringing home the Ark of the Covenant, celebrating the homecoming of God to Jerusalem. David celebrates with music and dancing, but his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul, does not approve, to put it mildly. David displays his love for God in a way that embarrasses Michal, but also shows God’s abundance through the generosity of David in feeding all of Israel.

Our second thread through the prophets. Amos is a shepherd, and a dresser of sycamore trees, who declares God’s judgment against Israel and that Jeroboam and the north will go into exile. The priest of Bethel that served King Jeroboam tries to get Amos to leave and to go to Judah in the south by damaging his reputation as a prophet, but Amos was never a professional prophet, just a shepherd and arborist that God called to speak to Israel.

Psalm 24 sings praises to God, who is the creator of all things. In the ancient world, gods ruled from mountain tops and so the people imagine God enthroned on a mountain, but coming down to enter the city. This psalm is referenced in the Christmas carol, “Lift Up Your Heads, O Mighty Gates.”

Psalm 85:8-13 is a beautiful passage of God speaking peace to the people. Steadfast love and faithfulness, will meet, and righteousness and peace will greet each other with a kiss. Faithfulness grows from the ground, righteousness looking down from the sky. In other words, heaven and earth are meeting, embracing, and God’s peace is flourishing, when the people turn to God.

Ephesians 1:3-14 contains the beginning of this letter, probably not originally to Ephesus, but rather a general letter written and copied to various congregations. This letter uses the language of children and property inheritance, metaphors that would have been universally understood across the Roman Empire. The writer declares that we are all children of God, adopted as God’s children through Jesus Christ and that through Christ we have the promise of the Holy Spirit and an inheritance, the promise of eternal life. For the Roman world, to become part of a faith rooted in Jewish tradition, the language of adoption and inheritance made sense.

Mark 6:14-29 is the final chapter of John the Baptist’s life. John, who precedes Jesus, is also killed by the state, though for different reasons. John was imprisoned because he spoke against Herod marrying his brother’s wife, but Herod also admired John and was troubled by him, because many thought of John as the coming of Elijah. John would not hold back his opinion, and Herod’s wife hated him for it. She plotted with her daughter Herodias and had John beheaded during a lapse in Herod’s judgment. John was beheaded, and his disciples later buried his body. John the Baptist’s ministry was to prepare The Way—and Jesus had already come.

The Narrative Lectionary has two choices for the next four weeks: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, or Creeds. Proverbs 1:1-7, 3:1-8 begins the section on Wisdom and Poetry, beginning with words attributed to Solomon about seeking instruction and wisdom. The writer instructs the listener to seek God’s ways, to follow God and to turn away from evil. The fear, or awe, of God, is the beginning of wisdom. Looking to God and being having awe for God leads to humbleness and righteousness.

The beginnings of John and Luke start the section on Creeds. John 1:1-5 is the poetic prologue that connects the Word with creation, the light that always shines and darkness does not prevail. This passage declares who Christ is, as the Word and Light. The passage from Luke declares the author’s intention to write down an account of Jesus’ life so that others may know the truth and believe. A creed is a system or statement of belief; Luke attempts to find the truth, and John declares that the Word was in the beginning with God.

We have been taught the commandments, the stories of our ancestors and the lessons of our faith. But Christ calls us to a new way of life, a life in which light shines in the darkness and darkness does not overcome it. A life in which we seek wisdom over material goods. A life in which we seek the well-being of others over our own gain. A life that calls us to stand for justice, even when our lives are on the line. This is the Way of Christ, prepared before us.

Call to Worship

The way of God leads to life,

**Seek wisdom and insight, and follow Christ.**

The way of God leads to truth,

**Love one another, for this is the commandment of God.**

The way of God leads to faith,

**Trust in God, for God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

Come, follow Christ, and join in worship,

**Let us join our hearts together as we worship God, who leads us into life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that often we do not follow Your way but instead follow the rise of the stock market, the growth of our bank account, the success of our career. We live in a society where success is based on having and consuming more than others, so that others go without. Forgive us for our selfish ways, for the wisdom of the world is foolishness, but the wisdom of Christ leads to love and compassion. May we turn from the world and follow You. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The Word became flesh and lived among us, and lives again. In Christ, we know the truth of God’s love, and the calling to new life now, that leads to eternal life. The dividing line of earth and heaven fades away. There is nothing that can separate us from God’s love. There is nothing that can separate you from God. Know that you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Go and live this new life, and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God, You have called us, each of us by name, to be Your voice in this world. Like Amos, we are not professional prophets. We may be shepherds or arborists, accountants or fisherman, firefighters and nurses, teachers and engineers—all of us have different gifts, different jobs we do, and You call us in our place to be prophetic. You call us to speak out against injustice, and in this time O God, we confess the sin of racism that is rampant in our world. When we see injustice, when we know the evil of racism, call us to speak out. Give us the strength and courage to be in solidarity with the oppressed, and encourage us to do the work that is hard to do. May we remember the call of Amos, and know that no matter what we do in our lives, You have called us into ministry, You have called us at times to be prophetic, and at times we must be encouraged to do the right thing. May Your Spirit encourage us always. In the name of Christ, who gave his life for us so that we might have life now and in eternity, we pray. Amen.