Worship Resources for July 12th, 2020—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 25:19-34 and Psalm 119:105-112; Isaiah 55:10-13 and Psalm 65: (1-8), 9-13; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Narrative Lectionary: Series on 2 Corinthians, Consolation: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Continuing the story of the ancestors of our faith, Abraham and Sarah’s son, Isaac, married Rebekah. Rebekah was unable to conceive, and so Isaac prayed, and then Rebekah conceived twins, but had a difficult pregnancy. During her labor, God told her there were two nations in her womb, and the elder would serve the younger. Later, after her twin sons grew up and Isaac was of old age, Jacob, the younger son, managed to convince Esau to sell his birthright for a bowl of lentil stew. This parallels another tradition included in chapter 27 where Jacob, with his mother Rebekah’s help, tricks Isaac into receiving the blessing intended for Esau. Some familiar patterns emerge from this story and other Biblical stories: God hears the cries of women who long for children. God tends to favor the underdog. God tends to shine towards those who break the rules of tradition when tradition is too binding.

This portion of Psalm 119 speaks of the importance of God’s ordinances and statutes. God’s word and law give light and life to the believer. The psalmist finds joy in living out God’s decrees and statutes, for they are the way of life.

The second selection of the Hebrew Scriptures in the Revised Common Lectionary follows the prophets. In Isaiah 55:10-13, the prophet speaks of the word of God having meaning and purpose, such as rain and snow falling upon the earth. All of creation is part of God’s purpose for humanity, and God raises up trees instead of thorns for the people, to be signs that God has not cut the people off, that God desires for the people to flourish.

The psalmist praises God who answers prayers and forgives transgressions in Psalm 65. The psalmist praises God for those chosen to serve at the temple. God is the Great Creator, who through awesome deeds has made the earth and provided for all of creation. The plentiful harvest and the fields full of grazing flocks are signs of God’s wondrous grace and might.

The Epistle readings continue in Romans 8, where Paul states that the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from sin and death. Because the Son came as one of us, and died as one of us, Christ condemned sin to death in Paul’s words. Our minds are now set on things of the Spirit instead of the flesh. Because the Spirit dwells in us, we are in the Spirit. Because Christ was raised from the dead, death has no hold on us, therefore sin has no hold on us. The Spirit that dwells in us gives life to our mortal bodies from death.

Jesus taught the crowds using parables, and in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower, who sowed seeds on different soils. The seeds that fell on good soil were not eaten by birds, or scorched by the sun, or choked out by thorns, but brought forth an abundance of grain. Jesus rarely explained parables, but in vs. 18-23, Jesus explains this parable, that those who hear the word and understand it will bear fruit.

The Narrative Lectionary begins a new series on 2 Corinthians. Paul begins this letter with the salutation addressing God as the “Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction” (vs. 3-4). In both suffering and consolation, Paul hopes the church in Corinth will know the consolation of Christ. If the believers are suffering, Paul hopes the church will know that Christ is with them through all ordeals—including a time of acute struggle in the Roman province of Asia, which Paul mentions in vs. 8-11. Whatever the persecution, Paul assures the church in Corinth that they share together in the consolation of Christ, the assurance that Christ is with them in their suffering and will see them through. There is hope found in Christ, and through the prayers of the community.

Where are your roots? What grounds you in times of uncertainty and fear? What sort of foundation are you, what sort of soil to bear fruit, as in the parable Jesus taught? We live in the most uncertain, trying of times, with Covid-19, which the continued struggle against white supremacy and for racial justice. Where is our consolation, our assurance? We find it in Christ, who reminds us to focus on how we can bear good fruit in trying times. How can we receive the word, understand it, and turn around to increase its yield?

Call to Worship (Psalm 117)

**Praise the Lord, all you nations!**

**Worship God, all you peoples!**

**Because God’s faithful love toward us is strong,**

**The Lord’s faithfulness lasts forever!**

**Praise the Lord!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, You made this world, the mountains that rise tall, the oceans that carve depths, the winds and the waves. You made everything that lives and moves, and You made us. In times of uncertainty, O God, we confess our fears. We confess our worries, we confess our frailty. We confess that our faith has been shaken at times. We call upon You, Great Creator, to work in us, to restore and renew our faith through Your love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Console us. Help us to deepen our trust in You by our faithfulness in love to each other. Remind us of the call to love our neighbors as ourselves, and through that love, may we find Your love is with us, all along. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good; God’s steadfast love endures forever (Psalm 118:1). Time and again, the psalmist reminds us that God’s steadfast love can never be taken from us, and that love will endure, when all things fall apart. Know that God’s love never ends, and is always with you, for God is good. Go and love one another, for by loving one another, we know God’s love, always. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Ancient Ones, God of our ancestors, God who knows humanity: help us to persevere in these trying times. Help us to remember that all things change in season, and this is a long season, but it will pass. These difficult times will come to an end. For now, O Spirit of Life, help us to breathe deeply into Your love, into Your peace, into Your call for justice. May we know Your presence is with us, now and always. Amen.