Worship Resources for July 14, 2013—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Amos 7:7-17 or Deuteronomy 30:9-14; Psalm 82 or Psalm 25:1-10; Luke 10:25-37; Colossians 1:1-14

Amos was called to speak an unpopular message, not only to the King of Israel, Jeroboam II, but also to the priest Amaziah. Called to speak in a time when there was relative peace, the wealthy were getting richer but the poor were getting left behind, Amos dares to speak out for God’s ways of justice and righteousness. Amos didn’t consider himself anyone special, not a prophet or a prophet’s son, just an ordinary shepherd. But God has called him to speak against the injustice of the ruling elite and the religious leaders who were supporting the system of injustice. Amos, though he does not see himself as a prophet at this time, stands in the line of other unpopular prophets called to speak unpopular messages of justice. Perhaps Amos is the most unpopular of all, because on the surface, everything in Israel seems to be going well, especially for the wealthy and the rulers; but underneath the surface, the poor are being traded for a pair of sandals (chapter 2).

In our second Old Testament thread, as we look back on God’s faithfulness through God’s covenant. Moses is preparing for his death, for the final journey of the Israelites into the promised land, and he is preparing them that if they follow the commandments of God, God’s faithfulness will endure forever. What God is asking of them is not too difficult, nor is it far-fetched; but rather, it should become second-nature, because the word is very near them (vs. 14). God delights in us when we are faithful, because we are concerned about the same things God is concerned about. Moses’ hope is that the people remember that the same God who brought them out of Egypt, and gave them manna in the wilderness, and gave them the commandments so that they would know how to follow God’s ways will not forget that God is always with them. Moses’ hope is for the people to remain faithful as God has remained faithful.

Psalm 82 sings of the heavenly court, in which God demands that justice be done on earth—that the poor are not forgotten, nor are the weak, the orphan and the widows. Those who have been left on the margins by human beings are most important to God. We are all children of God, but when we forget that others are also children of God, God calls for justice, and God will rise up to seek the lost and forgotten, the marginalized and the oppressed.

Psalm 25:1-10 is a prayer for God’s guidance in this life. The psalmist seeks God’s protection and help, but also prays for wisdom and insight in how to follow God, seeking forgiveness for where one has made mistakes in the past. The psalmist sings praises for the way God teaches us and gives us direction, and if we are faithful, we will understand God’s faithfulness.

Luke 10:25-37 is the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan. The greatest commandment is listed in all four Gospels in some variation. In Luke’s version, it is not Jesus who answer the questioner with the Greatest commandment, but it is Jesus answering a question with a question—when the lawyer asks “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus responds with, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” Jesus is telling the lawyer to look up what is in the law himself. The lawyer picks up on this dance of questions, and after responding to Jesus, and waiting for Jesus’ response, “You have given the right answer; do this and you will live,” the lawyer asks another question, “And who is my neighbor?” Then Jesus tells the parable, and asks the question at the end “Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” That is the final question asked, and the lawyer finally has to answer, “The one who showed him mercy.” Love is about showing mercy, and love is about doing justice. This is the way of God, the most important commandment: to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves, and the way of love is justice and mercy.

We have finished Galatians and now move into a 4-week session of Colossians, beginning with 1:1-14. Scholars are pretty sure Paul is not the author, but rather the very Epaphras mentioned in verse 7. What we hear is a message of encouragement, that we no longer live in the power of darkness but in the reign of Christ. The author begins with blessing the Colossians with God’s strength and endurance from God, that they may bear fruit and be pleasing to God and to others.

What we say about ourselves is not nearly as important as how we live out what we say—how we live out our lives with Christ. We are called by God throughout scripture and tradition to care for the poor, the outcast, the oppressed, and the marginalized—but throughout our history and scripture, we have found ways to make excuses. We have put ourselves before others and have justified our way of life, while others around us and in the world continue to suffer. We cannot remain ignorant of the struggles of others. Eventually, justice catches up to us. Moses warned the people in the wilderness, and they did not listen. Amos warned the king and the priest, and they did not listen and Israel fell a generation later. Jesus questions the lawyer who wants the right answer to be given, who wants to speak aloud the truth, and helps him to realize that it is about a love that shows mercy, a way of living towards others. How are we living out our faith? Are we just saying what we believe in? Is it more important to have the right statements of faith, or is it more important to do what Jesus has called us to do and live out our faith?

Call to Worship

Jesus calls us to love our God and love our neighbors as ourselves.

**Go, and do likewise.**

God tells us through the prophets to stand up for the poor and the oppressed.

**Go, and do likewise.**

Jesus tells us to welcome one another as a little child.

**Go, and do likewise.**

God has shown us the way of faith.

**Come, let us worship our God.**

**Come, let us live out our faithfulness to God through our faithfulness to others.**

**Come, let us love one another. Go and do likewise. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Everlasting God, You have remained faithful, though we have wandered near and far. We have followed our heart but also our wallets. We have listened to the prophets but also watched the stock market. We have treasured the teachings of Jesus but also looked out for ourselves. Forgive us for following the foolishness of the world. Call us back to Your Wisdom. We are grateful that even when we have gone astray, You have remained steadfast, our companion on this journey of faith. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Psalm 139)

Where can we go from Your spirit? Where can we flee from Your presence? In life, in death, in all the universe, You are the one who leads us on. We know Your forgiveness, Your love, and Your steadfast presence. Remind us always that we are loved and we are Your children. Amen.

Prayer

God Who Sees, You know us when we are lost in the crowd, when we are out of step with the pace of life around us, when we feel rejected and alone. God Who Hears, You listen to us when we don’t even know what we are saying, when words fall apart and all that escapes our mouths is silence. God Who Is, we feel Your touch in the breeze on our skin, Your presence in the arms that embrace us, Your life in the heart that beats inside us. You are present. You are here. You are Now. Help us to know this, now and always. Amen.