Worship Resources for July 15, 2018—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on 1 John, 4:7-21 (John 15:9-11)

In our first selection for the Hebrew Scriptures, we continue to follow the rise of the first Kings of Israel. In 2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19, David has been anointed king over Israel and Judah, and has the Arc of the Covenant brought to rest in Jerusalem. David rejoices and dances before the Arc, wearing only a linen ephod (and his first wife, Michal, the daughter of Saul and sister of Jonathan, who both have recently been killed, despises him in her heart). The Arc is brought to the tent that David has constructed, offerings given to God, and a portion is given to the people in celebration.

The psalmist calls the people to worship God in Psalm 24, for God is the one who made the earth and all that is in it; everything belongs to God. Those who are pure at heart are able to ascend the holy hill (Jerusalem, where the temple is). The psalmist calls the people to prepare to receive God, as they would receive a new king, for God is the king of glory.

The prophet Amos has a dire warning from God to be delivered to the king, but the priest Amaziah warns the king not to listen to Amos. For Amos’ words are that God has set a plumb line, a line of division in the midst of the people. When Amaziah tries to argue with Amos, Amos reminds him that he was just a shepherd, a dresser of sycamore trees, but God called him to speak. Amos gains nothing by being a prophet; rather, Amos is speaking the words God gave him, and Amaziah is standing in his way.

The psalmist calls upon the people to listen to the words God is speaking in Psalm 85:8-13. God will speak peace to the people. God gives what is good. Where God speaks, faithfulness springs up from the ground, righteousness comes down from the sky, and steadfast love and faithfulness meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. God brings all things together for good.

We begin the letter to the Ephesians with this introduction with a blessing of God through Jesus Christ. Ephesians may have been written by Paul, but the letter is more generic in tone, which lends that it was probably shared to the church in Ephesus and perhaps others (maybe the world’s first chain letter?) Paul begins this introduction the faithful have been chosen for adoption through Jesus Christ as children of God through God’s grace. Using language of adoption and inheritance, language that was familiar to the society and people of the time in both Jewish and Greek culture, Paul states that God’s desire is to gather all to God, both Jews and Gentiles, and that through Christ all who believe have obtained an inheritance of eternal life.

In Mark 6:14-29, we learn the fate of John the Baptist. Herod hears of Jesus and fears that John may have been raised from the dead, for Herod had John imprisoned and later killed him. Herod had married Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and John had told him it wasn’t right for him to do so, so Herod had John thrown into jail. Herodias had her daughter scheme to ask Herod for anything she desired—and the one thing she wanted was John the Baptist’s head on a platter. The writer of Mark suggests, like Pilate later, that Herod did not want to do this, but had no choice in order to keep peace in the family, he followed his own law.

In the Narrative Lectionary, we conclude the series on 1 John with 4:7-21, the writer’s beautiful declaration that God is love. Whoever does not love does not know God. Those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, because perfect love casts out fear. And ultimately, you cannot love God if you don’t love your sibling, your neighbor. If you do not truly love others, you don’t love God. We have seen our siblings, our neighbors, but we cannot see God unless we have love for our neighbors, for it is out of love God knows us.

John 15:9-11 contains Jesus’ statement, in his final discourse with his disciples, that as the Father has loved Jesus, so he has loved them. If they keep the commandments, they will abide in Jesus’ love. To know God is to know love, and if one doesn’t love others, they cannot know God.

The only line God has set is the line of love. If you do not love your siblings, your neighbors, you do not love God. That is what separates you. But we have ignored this line and set others, constructed rules as walls to keep out and divide. The only line is love, and it is an enclosing line, one that draws the circle wider. But when you refuse to love, you will be on the wrong side of the line. When you refuse to listen to God’s ways, like Amaziah, thinking only of your gain, you will be on the wrong side of the line. When you do not consider the love of your family or your people, like Herod, you will be forced to make terrible choices that are not out of love, but out of wanting to keep a false peace. The only line is love, but it is not a dividing line, it is an including line—unless you choose to set your own lines and walls.

Call to Worship (from 1 John 4:12-14; 16b)

No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another,

 **God lives in us, and God’s love is perfected in us.**

By this we know that we abide in God, and God abides in us:

 **God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

And we have seen and testify that God has sent the Son,

 **Who is the Savior of the World.**

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God.

 **Come, worship God who is love, and that love lives in us.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Love, we confess that we have placed conditions on your unconditional love. You called us to love one another; we decided to place limits based on race, gender, and sexual orientation. You called us to love one another; we decided that only if they pull themselves up by their bootstraps and speak the same language as us are they worthy of love. You called us to love one another; we decided our own capacity to love was limited to our own children. Forgive us, for you made us to love, and we have turned Your unconditional love into a conditioned disgrace. Forgive us, for we have made You into an image of oppression. Forgive us, for we have made You into our image. Call us away from this wretched disgrace of love, and into the fullness of Your love. For Your love made the world; Your love sent us Christ who laid down his life for the world. Call us into Your ways of love that bring us into one-ness with You, with others, and with all Your creation. In the name of Christ, who forgives us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from John 15:10)

Jesus said, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept God’s commandments and abide in God’s love.” We know that if we abide in God’s love, we truly have love for one another, and the capacity for forgiveness and restoration. God has that same grace for us. Know that you are truly loved; and with that love, go out and love the world. Amen.

Prayer

Mending God, the world is breaking around us; stitch us together again. Bind our hearts in love for one another. Heal the wounds of division by pouring love over us. Soothe us with Your Spirit like a salve, assuring us of Your continued presence. Knit us so we recognize our interdependence, making us strong so we cannot break apart again. In the name of the Great Physician, we pray. Amen.