Worship Resources for July 16, 2017—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Ephesians, 1:1-14 (John 14:25-27)

As we follow the origins of the Hebrews, we move to the third generation of Abraham and Sarah’s family, Esau and Jacob. There are two versions of the story in Genesis that pertain to how Esau lost his birthright. In this version, Esau sells his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup because he is hungry (the second is that Jacob steals his father’s blessing). Jacob is shrewd and cunning, and usurps his brother when he has the chance (in the second story, it is by Rebekah’s scheming that he gets his father’s blessing).

The psalmist praises God and pleads with God for their life in Psalm 119:105-112. The psalmist knows that the word of God is the light unto their feet, but they are struggling and need God’s aid and guidance. They face danger from their enemies, but are assured of God’s deliverance.

The second Hebrew reading continues the passages from the prophets with Isaiah 55:10-13. God is planting something new, and instead of thorns and bristles will come shading trees. These trees will celebrate God’s works along with the mountains and hills, as all of creation praises God.

The psalmist sings praise to God in Psalm 65:1-13 and calls for the people to choose to be close to God. God is the one who calms the storms and the seas. God is the one who brings forth the bounteous harvest, and waters the people with living water. All of creation is supported by God, fed by God, nourished by God, for God’s glory and joy.

Romans 8:1-11 reminds us that the Spirit has set us free from death. Paul declares that Christ has done what we could not, which is put sin to death, and that the law is now fulfilled in us. Paul uses the dichotomy of flesh and spirit—a notion that was popular in his day, easily understandable—but the spirit is the Spirit of God, which also raises dead bodies to life. There is nothing that cannot be redeemed by Christ, including our flesh.

Jesus tells the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, as he teaches beside the sea. Most of Jesus’ parables do not have an explanation in the Gospels, but this one does: Jesus explains that the seeds falling on different ground are those who hear the word of God, about the kingdom of God. Some of us fall among thorns that choke us out, or rocky ground, or on poor soil, but those who hear the word and receive it will grow abundantly in the kingdom.

The Narrative Lectionary turns to Ephesians, beginning with Ephesians 1:1-14. The introduction to this letter is fairly generic (I like to think of it as the world’s first chain letter, as it could be addressed to any of the early churches). The letter states that all are destined for adoption through Christ Jesus, using the language of inheritance that would have been known and understood in that culture. This metaphor of adoption and inheritance gives hope to Gentile Christians that they, too, have a place in the reign of God, the God that has been made known to the Jewish people, and now revealed to the whole world.

John 14:25-27 is Jesus’ assurance to the disciples that the Holy Spirit will come to be among them, that God is sending the Advocate. Jesus also declares that his peace will be with them, a peace that is not from the world, but will dwell within them, as Christ is still with them.

How do we allow the kingdom or reign of God to grow in us? How do we plant seeds that will thrive? The way of the world sells us out quick, looking for fast pleasures like Esau. Paul reminds us that sin has been put to death in Christ and no longer has a hold on us. Jesus calls us to think about what kind of soil we are for the seeds of the kingdom of Heaven. And in Ephesians, we are reminded that all people are God’s children and all have a place in the kingdom. How do we plant seeds in this world that will thrive, and invite others to join in the harvest of God?

Call to Worship

Christ’s peace is with you;

 **For Christ does not give as the world gives.**

Christ’s love is with you;

 **For God so loved the whole world.**

Do not let your hearts be troubled;

 **Do not let your hearts be afraid.**

Come, worship Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life;

 **Come, worship Christ, in whose love and peace we live. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession:

Ancient of Days, we confess that we are quick to embrace the new and erase the old. Help us to slow down to find the deep meaning in our scriptures and traditions. Help us to let go of customs and fads of how we have always done things, and search more deeply for the truth in life. Call us into the new life in this new world, while holding on to the ways of love, justice, and peace we have learned from the ancient scriptures, from the traditions of the faith, and from the ways of our elders. In the name of Christ, who came not to abolish the law but to fulfill it, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Christ has come and has prepared a place for us. Come, join together on the journey of faith. Join in the way of Christ. Join in the traditions and practices that have been passed down to us, that lead us into new life. Come, bring your open hearts. Come, be open, to the wisdom of the past and the hope of the future. Amen.

Prayer

Mystery with a capital M, deepen our understanding of Your love for us. Challenge our assumptions of others. Draw us into community with those who are different than us. Move us out of comfort zones and into spaces of grace, spaces of hope, spaces of healing. Grant us hearts that love justice, minds that seek peace, spirits that find possibility and encouragement in this world. Gather us together, and call us into Your ways. Amen.