Worship Resources for July 19, 2015—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a or Jeremiah 23:1-6; Psalm 23 or Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Narrative Lectionary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, Proverbs 8:1-11, 22-36; Creeds, Acts 15:1-21, 1 Corinthians 1:10-25

In our first selection from the Hebrew Scriptures in this season after Pentecost, we are following the Rise of the Kings. David desires to build a house for God after building his own palace, but God, through the prophet Nathan, reminds David that God has always been with him, wherever he has gone, and that God does not dwell in one place. Rather, God will help David make a home, and God promises to establish a new kingdom in the future from David’s descendants.

The second selection of Hebrew Scriptures is from the prophets, and this week we read from Jeremiah. God laments through Jeremiah the shepherds that have led the people astray. God promises to raise up new shepherds, who won’t leave anyone behind, who will follow God’s ways. God also promises to raise up a righteous branch from David—a king who will rule with righteousness and justice. In Christian tradition, this passage has been one seen as giving hope towards a Messiah, one who would establish a new kingdom.

Psalm 23 is the familiar passage of God as our Shepherd, and God is the one who leads us to places of protection and safety, guides us through the darkest times, where even the fear of death lurks, but will not overtake us—and God will bless us in front of our enemies. This familiar song has brought comfort for centuries, an assurance of God’s eternal presence with us, in life and death and beyond.

Psalm 89:20-37 is a song praising God for the anointing of David as king and the line of David as righteous before God. The psalmist at this point speaks in the voice of God, who has made a covenant with David and will establish the throne of David forever. Though the people will go astray and have to live with the consequences of their actions, God will not break the covenant with David. God’s promises to David endure forever.

Ephesians 2:11-22 speaks of how Christ has broken down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles. All are now children of God. All now have peace found in Christ Jesus, and the people, Jews and Gentiles together, have become one body in Christ. It is not that the Gentiles have finally found the God of the Jews, but rather God has brought together both, and they are now one people.

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 are bookends around the story of Feeding the Five Thousand and Walking on Water. Jesus, after being rejected at home, sent the disciples out two by two. In vs. 30-34, the disciples have returned, and Jesus has told the disciples to come and rest because so many people were now following them. Jesus knew they needed to take care of themselves, to rest—and yet Jesus also had compassion for the people, because they came together and were searching for something—searching for hope—and they were like sheep without a shepherd. In the second section, following the feeding and the walking on water, they cross over the lake and find more people are coming for healing and relief. The ministry of Jesus and the disciples is taking off, and the people are in great need.

The Narrative Lectionary has two choices for four weeks: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, or Creeds. Proverbs 8:1-11, 22-36 sings of Wisdom personified as a woman. These passages are not read often in church, displaying a feminine attribute of God—Widsom, present at creation, delighting in the human race, and instructing human beings in righteousness.

Acts 15:1-21 is Luke’s account of the Council at Jerusalem (Paul gives his own view in Galatians 2:1-14, a different view than Luke). Paul’s conclusion, according to Luke’s view, is that all will be saved through the grace of God, Jew or Gentile, and that Gentiles do not have to follow the Jewish law except in a few places, when it comes to the worship of idols and fornication. Pauls’ view in Galatians is more directed at the Jewish leaders who are requiring Gentiles to follow the law.

1 Corinthians 1:1-25 is Pauls’ view on the divisions within the church at Corinth. The church has split in several factions, following different leaders, and have focused on favoritism rather than becoming humble like Christ. Paul speaks of proclaiming Christ crucified, “a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (vs. 23). Christ has ended the division, and brought forth a new way—in that Christ gave his life for all.

During the difficult times of our lives and in our world, it is easy to be led astray. It is easy to take sides, to blame others, but God is establishing a new way of life, a new way of being—one that calls upon us to become last of all and servant of all, rather than being right. We can be scattered, like sheep without a shepherd, each trying to find our own way and to survive in our own way—instead of looking to God, who will lead us to still waters.

Call to Worship

When politics call us to take sides,

 **Christ calls us to serve one another.**

When issues threaten to divide us,

 **Christ calls us to love one another.**

When injustice and oppression seem to overwhelm us,

 **Christ takes on our burdens at the cross.**

Come, join in worship together,

 **For we are one faith, one body in Christ, and we need one another. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God Who Heals, we come to You in our brokenness, in our despair, in the hopelessness of the world. We know that You take up our burdens. When we feel the weight of the world on us, and feel that we are lost in the valley of the shadow, we have a hard time feeling Your presence with us. Become known to us, O God. May we feel Your presence in the most difficult times. May we feel Your healing when we feel most vulnerable. Help us to reach out to one another in our prayers and compassion, to help bear one another’s burdens, and help each other know Your presence. In the name of Christ, who makes us one, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God restores our soul. God leads us into the paths of righteousness, prepares a place for us, and blesses us, even in the most difficult of times. God loves you, and will never abandon you, even when you feel most alone. You are beloved and precious to God. Share this good news, and bear each other’s burdens. Amen.

Prayer

Shepherding God, bring us together when we have gone astray. Remind us that we are all one flock, one body, one faith. Help us to include those who have been pushed to the margins. Call upon us to cross over the fence to those who feel they cannot belong. May we know Your presence during difficult times, when the valley threatens to divide us, and lead us to the other side in safety and assurance. In the name of Christ, who makes us one, we pray. Amen.