Worship Resources for July 19th, 2020—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 28:10-19a and Psalm 139:1-12, 23-34; Isaiah 44:6-8 and Psalm 86:11-17; Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Narrative Lectionary: Series on 2 Corinthians, 2:1-10—Forgiveness

The first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures continues the saga of our ancestor in the faith. Jacob, the younger grandson of Abraham and Sarah and youngest of the twins of Rebekah and Isaac, fled his home to flee his brother Esau. On his way to his uncle Laban’s home, Jacob has a dream, of a ladder with angels ascending and descending. In the dream, God told Jacob that his ancestors would be numerous like the dust of the earth, and that the land he was on would be given to his descendants. God promised to not leave Jacob alone until this promise was fulfilled. When Jacob woke, he declared that God was in that place, and he made a pillar with the stone he had slept on, poured oil on top of it to make it an altar, and called the place Bethel, House of God.

The psalmist sings of an intimate relationship with God in Psalm 139:1-12, 23-34. God is the one who knows us so deeply, who knows our thoughts and our words. The psalmist asks the rhetorical question of where they could go to hide from God? God is everywhere, above in heaven and below in the place of the dead. Even at “the farthest limits of the sea,” God is with them. God is the one who knows us, who knows our minds and our hearts. The psalmist calls upon God to search them, to test them, so that the psalmist might show their true devotion to God, and that they trust God to lead them “in the way everlasting.”

The second selection of the Hebrew Scriptures follows the prophets. In this portion of Isaiah, the prophet, speaking to the people returning from exile, shares the words of God with the people: God is the first and the last, there is no other God. God is the people’s king and ruler, and there is no other God, no other one who is the rock for the people.

The psalmist turns to God in thanksgiving, and petitions to be taught God’s ways in Psalm 86:11-17. The psalmist praises God for their steadfast love and faithfulness, even though the psalmist is facing a current danger from enemies closing in. The psalmist calls upon God to save them, for they are a new generation of faithful servants, as their mother was before them. The psalmist concludes this section with a call for God to give a sign to their enemies, that the enemies would be put to shame knowing the psalmist is comforted by God.

The Epistle readings continue in Romans, and in this section of chapter 8, Paul writes that those who are led by the Spirit are children of God. Paul uses the image of adoption as the way that all people become children of God—not by blood, not by ancestry, but by God’s Spirit. The believer’s hope is in the restoration of both humanity and creation, and Paul calls the church in Rome to wait with patience.

Jesus tells another parable in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, the only other parable besides the Parable of the Sower that Jesus explains to his disciples. In this parable, the kingdom of heaven is compared to someone who has sowed good seeds in his soil, but while everyone was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat. The weeds cannot be removed without upending the wheat, so they must grow together until harvest. Jesus explains that he is the one who sows the good seeds, but the devil sows his own children. At the time of harvest, the angels will reap, and just like at harvest, the good grain is collected, and the weeds are burned. Remember, Jesus said the wheat and the weeds grow together. Rather than thinking we are either good or bad seeds, perhaps we have both within us.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series on 2 Corinthians with the theme of Forgiveness in 2:1-10. Paul wrote about a prior distressing visit to the church and the conflict there, and Paul decided not to return but instead references a prior letter (probably not be 1 Corinthians, but a lost letter) and speaks of the pain and distress from that conflict. However, Paul also writes of the hope of forgiveness, consolation, and reconciliation. If the church has forgiven this person that has caused the conflict, Paul will also forgive them, and Paul urges the church to show their love to the offender. Paul states the reason for his letter is to test them, to know obedience to Christ in everything, including forgiveness and love.

One of the great struggles of our present age is to break out of binary thinking. Good people and bad people. Good cops and bad cops. You’re either in or you’re out. Instead, when Christ told the parable of the wheat and the weeds, it’s similar to how John the Baptist told the crowds how the Son of Man would be on the threshing floor, separating the wheat from the chaff with his threshing fork (Matthew 3:12). Chaff and wheat grow together. We are all wheat and chaff, wheat and weeds. God is working on us to separate out sin and the effects of sin in this world—the trauma that has been experienced because of the evil systems of oppression. It is the systems that must be overhauled and changed, but for us—we must allow Christ to work on us, and burn out what the systems of the world have done to us, to restore who we were intended to be before God.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 139:1-4)

**“O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;**

**You discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,**

**And are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,**

**O LORD, you know it completely.”**

**We worship You, O God,**

**For you know us through and through.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator of the Universe, we confess to You that we have worshiped the things we have created rather than You. We have made idols of wealth and fame, and sometimes idols of safety and security. We have created systems to prop up our idols and to keep certain people in privilege and power. We suffer because of these systems that perpetuate racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and other forms of oppression including economic disparity. Forgive us, for You created us to care for this earth that You made for us and all creatures. Forgive us, for You made us all in Your image, all Your children, but we do not even treat one another as human. Call us back into true worship, true faith, true life, that is found in You. In the name of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Psalm 139:7-10)

“Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast.” God is with us, always. God’s steadfast love never ceases, and there is no place we can go where we can lose God, for God will always find us. You are God’s beautiful child. God desires for you to love one another, serve one another, and care for all of creation. Go and live into God’s ways of love, justice, and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Gardener of the Earth, we know You have sown good seeds in us and around us. Help us to find and nurture those seeds. Help us to prune back what needs to be pruned, and tear out what is harmful. But You, O God, help us to learn and grow, and sometimes we do not see the chaff that is growing with us until we learn. When we learn about racism, we peel off unnecessary and dead leaves. When we learn about our own privilege, we begin to tear out the roots of that chaff. When we begin to dismantle the systems and structures that perpetuate racism and other sins, we begin to build up a base of good soil for new seeds to take root. Loving Gardener, we know this is not easy, but inch by inch, row by row, work in us and through us, to grow Your beloved garden together. Amen.