Worship Resources for July 2, 2017—Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 22:1-14 and Psalm 13; or Jeremiah 28:5-9 and Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18; Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42

Narrative Lectionary: Psalms, Psalm 30 (John 6:67-69)

In the first selection from the Hebrew Scriptures, as we follow the origins of the Hebrew People, we come to this great, terrifying moment in these ancient stories of beginning: the story of Abraham preparing to sacrifice Isaac. Child sacrifice was common among the ancient peoples of the Mediterranean, and God shows through this story that God does not require human sacrifice; instead, a bull is provided. But the story is troubling nonetheless. Abraham appears willing to go through with it to appease God, and God’s demand of Isaac for a sacrifice ought to disturb us. However, in the end, Isaac is spared, and the ritual of sacrifice that was prevalent in so many ancient cultures is restricted to animals only. The message at the end of this passage is “The Lord Will Provide.” In other words, don’t be hasty to make sacrifices to gods, to look to the ways that other peoples get what they want; God will provide what you need. By the time we get to the prophets such as Amos, we hear that God does not desire sacrifice, but justice.

In Psalm 13, the psalmists pleads with God, for they have been under attack for so long without relief. Yet the psalmist trusts God to deliver them, and will trust in God’s steadfast love and salvation. In the end, the psalmist will sing with joy, knowing that God will remain faithful.

The prophet Jeremiah concurs with the prophet Hananiah in Jeremiah 28:5-9, that indeed God will bring the people out of exile from Babylon. However, it will not come to pass just yet. When the time of peace truly comes, then they will know the words have been fulfilled, but not until then. The prophets before Jeremiah and Hananiah prophesied the wrath that was coming, but when peace finally comes, they will know it has come from God.

Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18 sings praise to God for God’s steadfast love, and the covenant that God has made with David and his ancestors forever. The psalmist declares that those who worship God, who exalt God’s name will be full of joy, and God is the one who is the defender of the people.

Paul warns the early believers not to allow sin to remain in their lives in Romans 6:12-23. Although the weight of sin has been put to death through Christ’s death and resurrection, sin still exists, and the early believers must become obedient to the teachings of Christ which rejects sin. If they remain in sin, then they are still slaves to sin, but if they obey Christ, they will flee from sin. Sin leads to death, but following Christ leads to life.

In these three verses in Matthew 10:40-42, Jesus declares the welcome of God, and that when we welcome others in the name of Christ, we welcome Christ and therefore God into our lives. Showing hospitality was a Jewish value that Jesus upheld and encouraged, especially for those who were vulnerable. Welcoming others in the name of Christ opens us up to the grace and love of God.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series on the Psalms and the Gospel of John. In Psalm 30, the psalmist praises God who has turned their mourning into dancing. This psalm is noted to have been sung at the dedication of the temple, a moment when the people see God’s faithfulness. The psalmist sings how God was faithful, delivering them from death, and now the people will proclaim God’s praise forever.

John 6:67-69 are a few verses about the faithfulness of Peter and the other disciples. In a strange moment, in verse 66 we learn that there were disciples of Jesus who turned away from him and left the others. Only these twelve remained, including the one who betrayed him. But Peter says, “Where can we go? You have the words to eternal life.” The disciples know that there is no other way for them.

How do we show our faithfulness to God? Is it through sacrifice? Is it through trust? Is it by perseverance? Christ shows us that we show our faithfulness to God by welcoming the stranger as we would welcome God into our own home. Peter shows us in those few verses from John that faithfulness to God is knowing there is no other way for us, that this is the way and we are sticking with it. Abraham—and more importantly, Isaac—showed their faithfulness by not giving in to fear. Trust and obey, and welcome the stranger and care for their needs: this is how we show our faithfulness to God.

Call to Worship

Jesus has led us to eternal life;

 **We have come to believe, and know Christ as our Savior.**

Christ is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life;

 **We have come to believe, and know Christ as our Savior.**

We know the way to God through Christ’s love for us;

 **We have come to believe, and know Christ as our Savior.**

Come, worship God, and follow Jesus;

 **Join us as we journey in faith, knowing Christ is with us all the way. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Spirit of Life, You have led us through the wilderness, through the dark valleys, to silent and still places. We confess that the noise and clutter of the world today makes it hard for us to know Your presence. We are bombarded with images that we need more, that we ought to want more, that what we have isn’t enough. We despair over the news of violence, of poverty, of hate and hunger and disease. We dread the news of political leaders that still do not see every human being as Your child and make decisions that harm instead of help. Stir in us, Spirit of Life, and move the distractions away so that we can seek You. Stir in us, Spirit of Life, Your compassion and justice, so that we will know what to do. Stir in us, Spirit of Life, so that we can sit in the eye of the storm and know that You are God, and You are always with us. Spirit of Life, flow in us, move in us, and lead us to life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Listen in your heart, and hear the voice of God calling to you. Listen in your heart, and hear your own cries for justice heard as you answer the call from others. Listen in your heart, and know that in your heart of hearts you are loved exactly as you are by God, and you are called into the beloved community. Know in your heart of hearts you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, You know the ebb and flow of life. You know the beginnings and the endings and the new beginnings in the ribbon of time. Help us to not be afraid. Help us to do what we can to heal and restore, but we know that all things are in the palm of Your hand, and You will see us through. Help us to trust in You, and to trust in one another as we journey in faith, in this life and through eternity. In Your Name, Ancient One, we pray. Amen.