Worship Resources for July 20th—Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Our first Hebrew Scriptures thread in the lectionary follows the stories of the ancestors of the faith. We read of Jacob’s dram of the ladder from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending. Jacob has this dream when he is on his way to his mother’s home, fleeing from his brother’s wrath as he not only won his brother’s birthright but then stole his brother’s blessing by disguising himself as his brother. Jacob is a rascal. Jacob is crafty. While it may seem that Esau should be in the right, God seems to choose the underdog. Jacob was the second born and should not stand to inherit, but he is cunning and manages to grasp what he should not. God tells Jacob that Jacob will inherit the land that God gave to Abraham, and that a great nation shall come forth from him. Moreover, God promises to Jacob that God will remain faithful and will not leave him until God has done what has been promised to Jacob.

Isaiah 44:6-8 is a blessing to the people, reminding those who will be coming out of the exile that there is but one God, and God is their end and their beginning, their first and their last. God has spoken through the prophets of old and has shown the people that God remains faithful, God has been their God, the Creator of all, from the beginning of time.

Psalm 86:11-17 contains words of thanksgiving from the psalmist for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness, even when the singer’s own life is threatened and danger is all around. The psalmist asks for a sign of God’s favor, to prove to others that they are in the right, for they have remained faithful even when others around them have not.

Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24 is a song about God who creates each one of us, who knows each one of us intimately. There is no place we can hide, no place where we can be forgotten by God. God knows our hearts, God knows our true selves. We cannot hide ourselves from God, who made us.

Romans 8:12-25 declares that all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God (vs. 14). Creation waits for the revealing of the children of God. Creation is waiting for us to walk in the ways of God, to love our neighbor as ourselves, to be good stewards of all of God’s gifts including creation. God call us to not live by the ways of the world, for the ways of the world lead to death. Sin leads us to seek our own selfish gain—greed, envy, pride—rather than the well-being of others. Living by the Spirit means we do not live by the ways of the world but we live by the example of Christ: to love God fully, to be last of all, servant of all, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, Jesus tells the Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat, which is only found in Matthew’s Gospel in our Bibles. Like the Parable of the Sower, this parable also has an explanation given, and most scholars believe that was added later. On the surface, this appears to be a separation of good from bad, of righteous from wicked; but when we recall that Jesus will be the one on the threshing floor, as John the Baptist declared in Matthew 3:12, we remember that wheat and chaff grow up together, as do weeds and wheat—for the weeds will uproot the wheat if they are taken out. Jesus is at work separating the sin from within us, to burn in fire to purify. We are human beings, so we sin—and God is at work to remove that sin from within us through Jesus.

God knows our true selves. God knows that we all fall short, that we sin—we fall into the ways of this world and seek our own gain and pleasure and satisfaction over the needs of others. 1 John 1:8 says that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” We all sin and fall short (Romans 3:23). But God is constantly calling us away from the ways of the world we have created into the world God has created—in which we love one another, serve one another, and love God.

Call to Worship

The Creator has planted seeds in all of us,

 **May we nurture good deeds and loving-kindness.**

Jesus is calling us to bear spiritual fruit,

 **May we bless and build up others for the reign of God.**

The Holy Spirit moves in us, encouraging us to grow

 **May we be nurtured, may we be blessed and may we grow in this time of worship.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we confess before You that we do not follow the ways of the world You created, but instead follow the ways of the world we have created, in which we put ourselves above others, that our needs and desires are more important than anyone else’s. We put worldly success, fame and satisfaction above the needs of others, especially the people we do not see. Forgive us. Call us back into Your intention at our creation, to love others and to love You, to be good stewards of all You have given us and to participate in Your reign. Help us to turn away from the temptations of the world we have created, and to turn back to You. In the name of Jesus, who leads us into life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Psalm 139)

Where can we go from the Spirit? Where can we hide from God’s presence? There is no place we can go where we will be forgotten by God. There is no place we can fall into that God cannot find us. God restores us, and sets our feet back on right paths. We are forgiven, loved, and restored. Go and share the Good News, that God loves you madly. Amen.

Prayer

Holy God, the ways of the world we have created tempt us greatly. We desire to have more. We desire to move up the ladder of worldly success. We desire to be admired and looked upon. Transform our desires to be Your desires, to love one another and to seek the well-being of others. Transform our heart to be like Yours, to love all, but especially the overlooked, the unseen, the lost and forgotten, so that all may know Your love and grace. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.