Worship Resources for July 21st—Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Amos 8:1-12 or Genesis 18:1-10a; Psalm 52 or Psalm 15; Luke 10:38-42; Colossians 1:15-28

In our first Hebrew Scriptures series that runs through this season after Pentecost, we continue with Amos, a shepherd, a nobody who stood up to both the priest and the king to cry out for justice, especially for the poor. In this passage, Amos has a vision of a basket of fruit, marking the end of the fruitful time in which the wealthy elite lived off of the backs of the poor, and in which the priests catered to the ruling class and left the poor behind. The ruling class and the priests were into lavish harvest festivals. The poor were ransacked for money to pay for these festivals. God declares that there will be a famine, and they will suffer for their careless ways of waste and greed. However, even though we don’t read it this week, at the end of Amos, all is restored. God’s justice is not about punishment, but about restoration. The famine makes all equal, rich and poor, because there will be nothing again, but then it will be restored, vineyards and gardens, for all.

Our second series is about God’s covenant and the ways God upholds the covenant, even when human beings do not. We go back to Genesis, to God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah, to the promise of a son for them. But even before this promise is made (we do have hints of it in the covenant in chapter 17, though), Abraham and Sarah show hospitality and compassion to these strangers who have arrived. It is through their hospitality and compassion that God’s covenant is made, the promise to Abraham and Sarah kept. We uphold the covenant with God made so long ago when we show hospitality and kindness to the strangers among us, for God has shown hospitality to us in the giving of this world, and kindness throughout the generations.

Psalm 52 is an unusual psalm, sung against one’s enemies. The psalmist condemns the proud and the liars, and that God will “break you down forever.” God will catch up to you, or in the words of Johnny Cash, “God’s gonna cut you down.” We know that our deeds catch up to us, and that justice will prevail. However, we should not dwell on what others have done or what justice will look like for them, but rather remember that when we are faithful, God is faithful to us, as in verse 9: “I will thank you forever, because of what you have done.” We remember that God has been faithful to us, and so we turn our concerns away from the wicked and instead turn to God for guidance and assurance.

Psalm 15 is a short song of praise, reminding those who are faithful that God is their strength and stands by them. They shall not be moved. To the faithful, God’s presence is with us—we do not need to go to a sacred location—God’s tent is over us, God’s presence is with us, when we are faithful and trust that God is with us.

Luke 10:38-42 is the familiar story of Martha and Mary. Sometimes we simplify this story down to how Martha was distracted and Mary was not. Sometimes we assume that Mary was stronger and was willing to discard her gender-role by society to be a disciple of Jesus. While Luke and John had very different writers and audiences, I do like to take Mary and Martha and look at their whole story as told in both. We see two sisters who both at times struggle in faith. In John’s Gospel, Martha at first appears to be more faithful while Mary is more distraught at Lazarus’ death and that Jesus was not there. They are complex women, and I think what we need to recognize is that we all are both Mary and Martha. We have times when we are able to sit and listen and follow Jesus whole-heartedly. And then we have times when we are frustrated because the work is not being done that needs to be. I think we need both Mary and Martha, and it is a struggle for us in how we accept both.

Colossians was probably not written by Paul according to most scholars, but 1:15-28 is a beautiful image of Christ. We need to tread carefully as some of this discourse contradicts other Pauline passages. This writer is concerned that the Colossians know that even “thrones or dominions or rulers or powers” in vs. 16 are also created by Jesus and for Jesus, whereas Paul’s teachings are primarily counter-cultural to the empire (Romans 8:38-39 for example shows that nothing can separate us from God’s love, not powers or rulers or height or depth—seemingly counter-empire than this passage). Still, this passage suggests that Christ came to make peace with all, creation, God and humanity, and it is a beautiful image of Christ that was probably an early church hymn.

We struggle in our following Jesus. We want to do the work of God: defending the poor and pleading for the orphan, feeding the hungry and protecting the vulnerable; and we also want to deepen our relationship with God through Jesus. Sometimes we can become so religious we forget we are spiritual; and at times we are so spiritual we forget to be religious. Standing up for the poor and working to overturn systems of poverty while listening to stories and praying with one another; being in community in worship and in service; praying/meditating personally while writing letters to our representatives—we are both religious and spiritual, justice-minded and mystical. We need to live into the wholeness of our religious, spiritual life. We are embodied spiritual beings, and we need to embrace our whole selves for the sake of God, who came to us as Jesus the Christ.

Call to Worship (from Matthew 11:28-30)

Come, all that are weary, all that are carrying burdens so heavy

 **Jesus will give us rest**

Come, take what Jesus has to offer: love, forgiveness, and grace

 **Christ will give us peace**

Come, find rest, and learn from Jesus

 **For our Savior will give us rest in our souls**

Come, let us worship our God

 **Let us follow our Savior, who leads us into life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, You created the earth, whole and round; You created us to be whole people. But we have become fragmented, cracked and broken. We have been broken by false promises, lost relationships, shattered trust. We have become cracked with the experience of systemic sin: prejudice, oppression and fear. We have become fragmented, building up walls instead of lending hands. Forgive us when we have done the breaking, heal us where we have been hurt. Let Your light shine through our cracks and scars so that we might bring light to the world, showing that in You we are made whole. In You we find healing. In You we find renewed life. Help us to forgive, to love, to mend. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is the Potter, we are the Clay. When we are cracked and broken, God helps to bring us back together. Sometimes we don’t feel the same afterwards, but God uses every piece, and offers us the newness of life to begin again. Amen.

Prayer

God of Compassion, Mercy and Justice, send us Your love and grace through the loving presence of others. Help us to carry each other’s burdens as we struggle in this life and in our faith experience. Guide us in the path of justice with grace and humility, knowing we do not have all the answers, but that we trust in Your guidance to do what is right and just. Help us to judge a little less, love a little more, and overflow with Your grace and forgiveness for others as well as ourselves. In the name of Christ, who walks with us and knows our steps, we pray. Amen.