Worship Resources for July 22, 2018—Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Ruth, 1:1-22 (Matthew 5:3-9)

In our first selection for the Hebrew scriptures, we continue our series on the rise of the kings of Israel. In this passage, the prophet Nathan heard David’s desire to build a house for God, an earthly temple. At first, Nathan thought this was a wonderful idea, but God had different plans. God never asked for a permanent house, God had been with the people as they traveled, and was made known to them in the tabernacle and tent. Instead, God will make a home for the people, and God will grant David rest from war. Out of David’s house, out of his offspring, will come the new kingdom and David’s son will build the temple.

The psalmist of Psalm 89:20-37 praises God for King David. The psalmist, possibly a descendant of David or a servant of the king, remembers how God blessed David, and how God established his everlasting covenant with David. Though David’s descendants may not follow God’s ways, God’s covenant cannot be forgotten.

In the second selection of the Hebrew scriptures, the prophet Jeremiah warns those shepherds—those kings and other leaders—who have led the people astray. In 23:1-6, God declares that there will be new shepherds raised up, and God will gather the remnant of the flock. The days are coming, God says, when there will be a new righteous leader, a branch raised up from David’s family tree, who will lead with justice and righteousness and will save the people.

Psalm 23 is the ancient psalm reminding us of God’s presence like a shepherd, who walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death. Even in the darkest times, God is with us, God will deliver us, and God has gone ahead to prepare a place for us. Even in the presence of our enemies, in our most difficult of days, God chooses us, and we will dwell with God forever.

We continue in the Epistle to the Ephesians, in which Paul (or more likely, a student of Paul’s) states that Christ has broken the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles. This section promotes the unity in Christ, who has made peace through his death, that the law has now been abolished to create a new humanity in place of the two (Gentile and Jew). All are now citizens of the heavenly kingdom, through the spirit of unity in God. The united believers are now the spiritual dwelling of God, a holy temple.

In Mark 6:30-34, 53-56, the disciples have returned from being sent out two by two. And Jesus declared they should rest, and took them away to a deserted place to eat and sleep—to practice some self-care. But the crowds recognized them, and Jesus had compassion for the people, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They needed care, too. Once they crossed over the lake, the people began bringing their sick, and Jesus healed them.

The Narrative Lectionary begins a series on Ruth this week. In chapter one, we meet Naomi, and learn her tragic story in the first five verses: she and her husband moved to Moab during a famine, he died, her sons married Moabite women, and then her sons died. Naomi decides to return home to Israel now that the famine is over. Her daughters-in-law both started to return to her, but Naomi tells them to go home. As young women, there is a possibility they can get married again (widows in those days would marry the next of kin, but since there wasn’t any, they would go back to their father’s house so he could marry them off again). But Ruth refuses to go back. She clings to Naomi and says, “where you go, I will go. Your God will be my God. I will live where you live.” These vows, similar to marriage vows, show the bond between Ruth and Naomi, and Ruth’s determination that Naomi was now her family, even though Ruth would be considered a foreigner, an outsider, when they returned to Naomi’s hometown of Bethlehem.

Matthew 5:3-9 contain the first part of the Beatitudes, blessings for those who desire to live in the reign of God, even though they face hardship now. Blessed are those who are poor in spirit and those who mourn, those who have struggled—they will know God’s presence, God’s blessings, God’s abundant love, justice, and mercy.

In a time where we may feel like we are sheep without a shepherd, where we are wandering and lost, may we remember the example of Jesus, to care for ourselves, and to care for one another, and to be filled with compassion. So many are struggling in these days. It seems at times that all hope is lost. But Christ is with us. Christ calls us into times of rest and renewal, and Christ calls us to have compassion with one another, for the needs are great. There are many who need God’s healing work, and they will continue to come. We must rest, and do the work Christ has called us to do, for the healing of the world. We may not see the fulfillment of the work in our lifetime, but we know it will come.

Call to Worship

The Spirit of God is gathering us together;

 **The Good Shepherd is leading us onward.**

God our Creator made us to be together, to be one flock, one fold;

 **The Good Shepherd is leading us onward.**

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is calling us by name, and we know their voice;

 **The Good Shepherd is leading us onward.**

Come, gather your hearts in worship, and follow Christ our Lord;

 **The Good Shepherd is leading us onward.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come before You as a broken people. We have scattered out of fear. Our attention is all over the place, our fears run rampant, our despair overwhelms us. But You are the Good Shepherd. Guide us, O God. Gather us together. Lead us through this valley of shadow, lead us to green pastures and still waters. Lead us into hope. Gather us together so that we might draw strength from each other, encouraging each other, and lifting up one another. Remind us that we are not alone. May Your Spirit move in us, binding us as one. In the name of Christ, who is our Good Shepherd, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the one who laid down his life for his sheep. Jesus knows us, and we know his voice, we hear it calling us. Jesus is gathering us together in the name of justice. Jesus is gathering us together in the name of peace. Jesus is gathering us together in the name of love. You belong. You are important. You are loved. You are part of this flock. Listen for the voice of the Good Shepherd, and do justice, practice peace, and love one another. Amen.

Prayer

Maker of All, You made us in Your image, and You made us to be embodied. You created us to become one body, and You dwell in us here on earth, as we will dwell with You in heaven. Remind us to care for this whole body, to care for all its parts. Help us to have compassion with one another. Help us to find places of rest and healing. Renew us so we can do the work You have given us to do, as Your body here on earth. Maker of All, renew us, refresh us, and guide us in this journey of faith. Amen.