Worship Resources for July 23, 2017—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Ephesians 2:11-22 (Matthew 28:16-20)

After Jacob managed to get Esau’s birthright, Isaac sent him to find a wife from Rebekkah’s family. On the way, Jacob had a dream, after using a stone as a pillow at a place that he later named Bethel. Upon that stone, Jacob dreamed of a ladder with angels ascending and descending upon it. In the dream, God renewed the covenant that he gave first to Abraham and then to Isaac, that from Jacob’s descendants will come a great nation. God told Jacob, “Know that I am with you, and wherever you go.” This promise was part of the covenant—that God will be Jacob’s God, and the God of the people descended from Jacob, forever. Jacob built an altar with the stone he slept upon, poured oil on it, and declared that surely God was in that place.

God is the one who created us and knows us inside and out in Psalm 139. There is no place we can hide, no place where we can be taken, that God cannot find us. God knows our true hearts, who we really are, and will see us through in faithfulness.

God speaks through the prophet Isaiah in 44:6-8 that there is no other god like God. The people are witnesses of God’s faithfulness and steadfastness. For the people, there is no other God to turn to. God is the first and the last.

Psalm 86:11-17 is a plea to God to help the psalmist walk in God’s ways, and walk in God’s truth. The psalmist is threatened by others, and seeks God’s deliverance and aid. The psalmist uses the image of being the child of God’s servant girl—in other words, raised to be faithful to God—as an image of faithfulness to God’s ways.

Romans 8:12-25 declares that we are heirs with Christ, children of God, and that we are led by the Spirit. Paul declares that what the faithful have been through is worth it, for nothing compares to the glory that is to come. All that God has made, all of creation, has been laboring to give birth to something new. Even within us, the Spirit is at work, laboring something new that is being born: we have become children of God.

Jesus tells another parable in Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, that is similar to the parable of the sower, but in this case, the sower planted good seeds in good soil, but someone else planted weeds. If the sower tries to uproot the weeds, it will uproot the good plants, so the sower must wait until harvest time. This, and the parable of the sower, are the only two parables where an explanation is given. All that causes sin and death will be thrown into the fire, all the parts of us that still sin will be destroyed, and we will be gathered up as new creations in Christ.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series in Ephesians with 2:11-22. The writer declares that Christ has brought together Jews and Gentiles, erasing the dividing wall, and declaring both children of God. All hostility and sin has been put to death through the cross, and through the Spirit both are now children of God, and all are the body of Christ.

Jesus gives the great commission at the end of Matthew’s gospel account, declaring that all authority is under him. Jesus commissions the disciples to go to all nations, to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There is no longer any division, but all are to become children of God, and Christ is with the faithful, from now until the end of the age.

What we divide, God brings together. What we declare unclean, God makes clean. What we decide is dead, God brings to new life. God is with us, wherever we go, and God works all things towards reconciliation. God sent Christ to us to bring forth new life, to reveal that there is no division in the reign of God, but all are children of God.

Call to Worship

God has created each of us, a seedling ready to bloom;

 **Come, be nurtured by the water of the Spirit.**

God is birthing something new in creation and in us;

 **Come, the Spirit is bringing forth new life!**

God is leading us into a new way of being;

 **Come, Christ has taught us the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**

Come, worship God, breathe in the Spirit, and follow Christ;

 **Come, join together in worship.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have not lived into the way of the Spirit. We have separated ourselves out, thought ourselves better than others, and placed heavy burdens for others to bear. We have not seen others as children of God but rather as rivals. Forgive us for our foolish divisions. Call us into accountability to love our neighbors as ourselves and to remember that we are all Your children, all kindred in Christ, for in Christ You have reconciled us to You and to one another. Call us into the way of faith, into justice, mercy, and reconciliation. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

No matter where we go, no matter how far we think we’ve gone, Christ is bringing us back home. Listen for the call of God and hear God’s welcome in your life, and extend that hospitality to others. Know God’s forgiveness, and live into God’s ways of reconciliation. Amen.

Prayer

God of Dreams, we have seen a glimpse of Your dream in the vision of Christ to go and make disciples of all nations. We have seen a glimpse of Your dream in John’s vision of people of all tribes and languages and nations coming together to praise You. We have seen a glimpse of Your dream in the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr, and in his hope of the beloved community. Help us to be dreambuilders. Call us to chase wild dreams like the prophets, to be full of their hope and courage, so we can participate in the building of Your beloved community on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.