Worship Resources for July 24, 2016—Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Hosea 1:2-10 or Genesis 18:20-32; Psalm 85 or Psalm 138; Colossians 2:6-19; Luke 11:1-13

Narrative Lectionary: Job 31:35-37; 38:1-11

Hosea’s marriage is a metaphor for God’s relationship with Israel. If that wasn’t bad enough, look at the names of their poor children and you might thank God your parents were not prophets. But even with this temper-tantrum rage in which Hosea’s children are named some not-so-nice-names, afterwards, God declares that they will be called “Children of the Living God.” Reading past this selection in Hosea, one finds that the children are renamed and Hosea’s wife returns to him, because God is always faithful to us, even when we are not, and God renames us, even when the world has treated us poorly and judged us and has called us names.

Genesis 18:20-32 is the foreshadowing of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, the conversation between Abraham and God shows that God does not desire destruction; God does not desire punishment. Rather, the consequences of our actions often lead to results that look and feel like punishment. In this case, despite God telling Abraham that even if there are ten righteous people in the city, he will not destroy it, the men in the city fail to welcome in God’s messengers and instead wish to do them violence. So violence becomes their ending. In this passage, though, we see Abraham intervening on the behalf of the people with God’s anger, as the prophets often did—and as we ought to do when an entire group is condemned on behalf of the actions of some.

Psalm 85 calls upon God to show steadfast love to the people, even though the people have fallen astray. God continues to remain faithful, and will revive us with faithfulness springing up from the ground. God provides goodness and mercy, time and again, and the psalmist sings this prayer and assurance of God’s righteousness and faithfulness.

Psalm 138 sings praises to God, who remains faithful, and answers to those who call upon God. God knows our inmost thoughts, seeks the humble, and to those who give thanks to God, God delivers them from evil and does not forsake them.

We continue in reading the letter to the Colossians in 2:6-19. In a time when the Greek philosophers were teaching on the streets, the writer warns those reading to not be taken in by the philosophy of the day. Christ embodies, quite literally, our faith in God. In Christ we know the fullness of God, and the writer warns of straying away from Christ to follow the philosophies of the day or the fads that some of the churches were following in terms of Gnosticism and angel worship. Rather, what separated us from God was nailed to the cross, and now nothing can—so beware of those sects and movements that call for further rules or restrictions, putting up further barriers to God.

Prayer is paired with action, according to Jesus in Luke 11:1-13. Jesus tells the disciples to pray for the kingdom, for their daily bread, and for forgiveness. Jesus then goes on to teach that we must be persistent, but also to meet the needs of others—we pray for our daily bread but we ought to answer the knock at the door asking us for bread. We know how to give gifts to others, and God will give to us. But it is a both/and: our prayer must also have action. As we pray for God to give us our daily bread, we ought to make sure those around us have enough to eat as well and use what we have to meet the needs of others.

The Narrative Lectionary continues with Job. In this fourth part of study, we finally hear God’s response to Job. 31:35-37 contains Job’s desire that God would hear him and answer him, because then he would know. However, when God responds in chapter 38, it is not exactly what Job wanted. Job wanted God to respond to his hurt and pain and make it seem justified. Job has been asking God “where are you?” Instead, God answers Job that God is being the Creator and is at work—God’s answer is another question, “Where have you been? I’ve been laying the foundation of the earth and setting the limits of the sea.” God does not provide pat answers for Job, but rather reminds Job that God is at work all around him, and never left.

God works through each of us, helping us to bear one another’s burdens. But sometimes, like Job, we want God to do all the work and answer us directly. Sometimes, like the disciples, we want to know the right way to pray. But prayer is paired with action. We know God’s presence is around us when God’s presence is working within us to love our neighbor as ourselves. God calls us to be the hands that pull others out of the water, the feet that carry others forward, the heart that continues to beat when others are in the shock of grief and loss. And when it comes to where our feet cannot carry us or our hands cannot reach out, or our heart has suffered too much, God will work in others around us to do the same.

Call to Worship:

Christ has said to us:

**“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”**

Christ has said to us:

**“Pray for the kingdom to come, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Christ is calling us today:

**Pray for God’s will to be done in us, by serving one another, and sharing the love of Christ in all we do.**

Christ is calling us in this moment to worship:

**We join our hearts together, serving God by serving one another, lifting up our hearts in prayer and praise to our Almighty God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession:

Holy One, at times our moments of hurt overwhelm us. We have been fractured and broken by mistrust, false judgment, pride and selfishness. We have been scarred at times by the wounds of others. We hurt, and at times we end up hurting others. Heal us. Call us into wholeness. Tend to our spirits when we are downtrodden and grief-stricken. Care for us with all our scratches and scrapes and broken hearts. In the name of our Great Physician, in whose scars we find wholeness, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God knows our inmost wounds, our deepest hurts, the scars that are still very tender though it has been years. God knows where we need mending, and has sent us each other to help. Accept the grace and love of others, and allow your hearts to be full again, for God loves you madly and wants you to be well, to be whole, and to know that you are loved beyond what you can imagine. Take this love and share it deeply with yourself, and with one another. Amen.

Prayer

Enduring Love, remind us of how beloved we are to You, when we are feeling downtrodden and alone. Steadfast Love, remind us how Your love flows through our lungs with every breath of Your Spirit. Eternal Love, remind us that You are engraved in our very hearts, for the Word became Flesh, as we are, filled with Your love, grace, and truth. Love Beyond Love, remind us that we know Your love best when we are loving others. In the name of Your Beloved One, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.