Worship Resources for July 26th, 2015—Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 11:15 or 2 Kings 4:42-44; Psalm 14 or Psalm 145:10-18; Ephesians 3:14-21; John 6:1-21

Narrative Lectionary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, Ecclesiastes 1:1-11, 3:1-17 or Creeds, Proverbs 1:1-9, 1 Peter 3:8-17

We have been following the rise of the Kings in our first thread through the Hebrew Scriptures, but just as Saul had his downfall, today we read of the downfall of David. Instead of being with his soldiers, he has stayed home, and find Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, bathing on the roof of her home. David has his messengers find out who she is, has them bring her to him, and he sleeps with her. She becomes pregnant, David tries to cover up what he has done by having Uriah sleep with Bathsheba, but Uriah refuses, because he has pledged himself to God and king. David ends up having Uriah sent to the front lines to be killed, to hide his secret affair.

Our second thread is following the prophets, and this reading from 2 Kings is about a time when the prophet Elisha told someone who was bringing the first fruits of their harvest to dedicate to God to give it to the people instead. The people were hungry and in need, and the prophet Elisha knew that the people’s needs were important to God. As the prophet Micah later says, what does God require of us but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God? Elisha knew that meeting the needs of the people was more important than the symbolic sacrifice—and there is more than enough for everyone.

Psalm 14 sings of the faithfulness of God, even though the psalmist is still waiting for God to deliver them. The psalmist knows the people have not been faithful to God, but God’s love is steadfast. The psalmist warns those who have gone astray and have ignored God, that God will deliver the people, but will also judge the people with righteousness.

Psalm 145:10-18 is a song of blessing to God, whose dominion is the whole earth, whose reign never ends. God provides for all, and is just and righteous. All who are faithful will speak of the goodness of God and God’s reign.

Ephesians 3:14-21 is an ancient prayer before God that includes a benediction. The writer prays for strength, encouragement, and endurance in faith for the reader, and then offers the blessing that God’s love and power is far beyond what we can ask or imagine, and that God will accomplish great things in us through Jesus Christ.

John 6:1-21 is John’s account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand. In John’s account, after a crowd has followed Jesus and the disciples up a mountain, they are hungry. A little boy has five barley loaves and two fish, and Jesus has the people sit down, and he gives thanks for the food and gives it to them. There are twelve basketfuls left over. Following this, Jesus goes off by himself because the people want him to be their earthly king, right in that moment. Jesus waits until nightfall, and then returns to the disciples who are out on the sea and the waves are crashing from the wind—Jesus walks on the water to them, and tells them to take heart. “It is I—do not be afraid” (vs. 20).

The Narrative Lectionary continues to have two choices: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, or Creeds. The first selection contains two chapters from the book of Ecclesiastes, a writer who has experienced it all, and finds that much of the desire in the world is vanity, a chasing after wind—like mist that you can see, but you cannot hold on to. Instead, God gives us joy when we work for good. God will judge all, and what can we do, but help one another and find joy in the life we have?

The selections for Creeds come from Proverbs and the first letter of Peter. Proverbs begins with speaking about the importance of wisdom, and a phrase uttered throughout the wisdom literature in the Bible: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” That fear is more like awe, amazement at our wondrous God.

1 Peter 3:8-17 speaks of unity and love for one another. This letter is not considered authentic, but rather by a disciple of Peter, who conforms to traditional views on gender roles (contrast with Paul’s writings in Galatians). Nevertheless, the words here about finding unity and strength during times of persecution are valuable to remember, in that doing the right thing, living righteously, is not always rewarded on earth, but we must persevere.

God’s faithfulness endures forever, and this faithfulness is lived out in our own trust of God to care for us while at the same time trusting God to empower us to live in righteousness. God has called upon us to do the right thing, and sometimes we need to remember that we are the body of Christ, and that God is using us to do God’s work in this world, right now.

Call to Worship

May you be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit;

 **Spirit of God, enter us and fill us with compassion and justice.**

May you be encouraged by Jesus Christ to love one another.

 **Christ Jesus, enter our hearts and fill us with Your love.**

May you be renewed by our Creator God;

 **Ancient of Days, re-create in us a sense of awe and wonder at Your works.**

 **May we enter this time of worship, a new creation,**

**ready to do the work Christ has given us to do. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, You created the heavens and the earth, and yet we doubt Your goodness. We see war and poverty, despair and oppression, and the great horrors the works of our hands have done. Yet You created us in Your image, and You have given us good works to do. Help us to undo the wrong in the world, to tear down the walls, and instead to be works of restoration, to restore the goodness of Your creative work. In the name of Christ, who continues to do good works in us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Lamentations 3:22-23)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God’s mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning. Great is God’s faithfulness, the one in whom we put all our trust, hope, and faith. Know that you are forgiven. You are a new creation in Christ. Go and do the work God has given you to do, to love one another, and care for each other. Amen.

Prayer

Author of Life, You have written us into Your great work. You have given us all an important role. Help us to re-discover who we are, who You created us to be. Help us to go back to Your created intention: to do good work in this world, to care for all of Your gifts of creation, and to be Your body in Christ here on earth. May we recognize our inter-connectedness and inter-dependence. May we see ourselves as Your children, as Your body, as part of Your creation. In Your name, we pray. Amen.