Worship Resources for July 26, 2020—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 29:15-28 and Psalm 105:1-11, 45b or Psalm 128; 1 Kings 3:5-12 and Psalm 119:129-136; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Narrative Lectionary: Series on 2 Corinthians, 4:1-18—Treasure in Clay Jars

Following the continuing saga of our ancestors in the faith, the first selection for the Hebrew scriptures contains the story of Jacob’s marriages in Genesis 29:15-28. Jacob, the slightly younger twin son of Isaac and Rebekah, fell for the younger daughter of Laban, Rachel. Jacob made a commitment to Laban to serve him for seven years in order to marry Rachel, but Laban tricked Jacob by getting him drunk and having him sleep with the older sister, Leah, on his wedding night. Laban’s retort that marrying the younger before the older, that this is “not done in our country” suggests that Laban knew Jacob wasn’t supposed to inherit as the younger son, either. But Jacob agreed to work seven more years and married Rachel, in addition to Leah.

God is the one who remembers the covenants made, the psalmist sings in Psalm 105:1-11, 45b. The psalmist recalls that God is the God of their ancestors, the one who promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the land as an inheritance. God fulfills the promises of old to the children of Jacob, the descendants of Israel, and the psalmist calls upon the people to remember and give praise to God.

An alternate psalm choice is Psalm 128, a psalm of blessing, perhaps for a wedding. Those who live into God’s ways and follow God’s teachings will live good lives, and the psalmist asks God to bless the faithful with long life, good fortune, and a good family.

In the second selection from the Hebrew scriptures, in 1 Kings 3:5-12, King Solomon dreamed that God spoke to him, and God told Solomon to ask him for what God should give him. Solomon chose an understanding mind, and the ability to discern good from evil. Solomon chose wisdom over long life, riches, or victory over enemies, so God granted him a wise and discerning mind. With wisdom, Solomon reigned successfully and was able to maintain peace and good fortune for his family and kingdom while he was alive.

This portion of Psalm 119:129-136 sings of the wisdom that comes from God through the commandments and decrees set forth by God. The psalmist calls upon God to be gracious to them, to keep themselves close to the path of God. They long to live into God’s ways and grieve because others do not keep God’s commandments.

The Epistle readings continue in Romans, as Paul continued his discourse about suffering, that in the time of suffering the Spirit intercedes “with sighs too deep for words.” God knows our suffering, and the Spirit is with us in our suffering. Paul calls upon the Romans to persevere. As he concludes the first half of his letter to the church in Rome, through a use of rhetorical questions, he reminds them that God is with them, God will not fail them, God will not abandon them. Paul powerfully ends this section with the promise that there is nothing that will ever separate them from God’s love through Jesus Christ.

Jesus tells four short parables in Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52. In the first two, about the kingdom of God being like a mustard seed, and a treasure hidden in a field, the act is intentional: someone has sowed a mustard seed, an invasive species, into their field. And someone has hidden a treasure in a field, deliberately. God is at work, and we have to discern it and find it. It is subversive. The second two parables, the pearl of great value, and the fish of every kind, is more about the action of the person searching. One finds a pearl so valuable they sell all they have to buy it (and the same is of the treasure hidden in the field—someone sells all they have to buy the field, to have that treasure). The net thrown into the sea catches fish of every kind, but only keeps what is good, what is valuable. From these four overlapping parables, we know that God is at work in the world around us, the kingdom of God is at hand and is coming! But we also know that God is at work in us and in our world, and what is not useful in our lives, in our world, must be sorted out. We are called to sort through the world, look for the kingdom of heaven at work. We sort out what is bad, what is holding us back, what is evil. We sort out what is new, and what is old, what is not necessary any longer.

The Narrative Lectionary continues the series on 2 Corinthians with Treasure in Clay Jars. In 4:1-18, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about how some listened to false teachings, and heard from the god of this world, instead of Jesus Christ. Paul encouraged the church to not lose heart, to renounce the ways of this world, and that even though things are veiled, to trust that God’s light is shining in their hearts. There is treasure inside these clay jars, these weak human bodies, and even though we struggle now in this life, and our “outer nature” is wasting away—what is inside us is renewed, and even though it can’t be seen, it is eternal.

God is at work in our world and in our lives, and we cannot always see it, but we can know it to be true. God’s Wisdom leads us to follow the commandments, what has been passed down to us, as a way of life. If we allow our lives to be transformed, we begin to see how the reign of God is at work in the world around us already. We begin to discover the treasures that have been hidden for us. We begin to sort through what is good, what is of God’s reign, and what is unnecessary and holds us back. We begin to discern what is evil, and hold fast to what is true, and good, and building us up. We know that holds us back is temporary, but what is still to be seen is eternal, as is God’s love.

Call to Worship (Psalm 105:1-4, 45b)

**O give thanks to the LORD, call on God’s name,**

**Make known God’s deeds among the peoples.
Sing to God, sing praises to God;**

**tell of all God’s wonderful works.
Glory in God’s holy name;**

**Let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.**

**Seek the LORD and God’s strength;**

**Seek God’s presence continually.**

**Praise the LORD!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Sneaky God, we confess that we aren’t paying attention. We fail to see that You are at work in the world around us. We fail to see the treasures You have hidden for us: the joy found in sunrises and sunsets, the breathtaking rainbow after the storm, the comet in the night sky. There are secrets we don’t understand until we experience them: the love You plant between two people, the laughter of children, the tears that bring relief. We often aren’t paying attention to how You are at work in the world around us. Open us up to the hidden treasures, the secret delights of life, O God, and help us to live into Your wisdom and insight, with the Spirit’s leading. In the name of Jesus Christ, who showed us the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (2 Corinthians 4:16a, 18)

“So we do not lose heart, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” We do not lose heart. God is with us. God’s Wisdom is found in creation, in the company of one another, in the words of Scripture, in the love we hold in our hearts. God’s steadfast love endures forever. You are not lost. You are God’s beloved child. Live with this knowledge in the fullness of your heart, and go forth, sharing this good news and good love to the world that desperately needs it. Amen.

Prayer

Eternal Love, when the world fails us, we know You do not. When the world tosses us out of its nets, You catch us, and call us good, and love us and care for us. When the world rejects us, You embrace us. We don’t fit in, we sometimes feel we don’t belong, but we belong to You. You call us precious. You seek us from the shadowy corners of the world and bring us into Your light, Your warmth, Your love. Remind us of how precious we are, O God, and how much we are needed, when the world brings us down. Help us to go and seek others, like hidden treasure in a field, and share Your love and light with all. Amen.