Worship Resources for July 27th, 2014—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

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

Our first thread in the Revised Common Lectionary in Genesis 29:15-28 follows the ancestors of our faith, Abraham and Sarah through to the people entering the Promised Land. We read today of Jacob marrying Rachel and Leah, and their maids Zilpah and Bilhah, who will become the mothers of the twelve tribes of Israel. We learn that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree—just as Jacob schemed to get Esau’s birthright and their father’s blessing, so Laban tricks Jacob into marrying Leah before Rachel. God does not always work within the lines of social convention and norms; God stretches beyond what we know and understand in keeping the covenant with the people.

In our second thread of 1 Kings 3:5-12, we read of King Solomon asking God for the gift of wisdom. Solomon is young, and could ask for anything, but Solomon asks for the thing he already has, for insight from God, and the text tells us that God was pleased with Solomon, because when God sought Solomon, Solomon sought God. When our desire is for God, when we are seeking God, the desires of this world do not have a hold on us.

Psalm 105:1-11, 45b sings of thanksgiving to God and calls upon the congregation to seek God and God’s ways, to remember that God is the one who established the covenant with the people long ago. The psalmist sings to the congregation to remember that God will not forget the covenant, and that God is the one who is the final judge when it comes to upholding the covenant.

Psalm 119:129-136 also is a song to God but it is more intimate, from the psalmist directly to God about keeping God’s covenant, God’s commandments and decrees. The psalmist desires to draw closer to God and seeks God to keep them safe, to protect them, and to guide them in the ways of God.

Psalm 128 is a blessing to a family that seeks God and walks in God’s ways. They will experience the blessings of God in their home life, and the psalmist promises them long lives for those who live into God’s ways.

Romans 8:26-39 is the crux of Paul’s discourse to the Romans about the love of God in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit helps to direct our lives, and if God is for us, who can be against us (vs. 31)? All things work together for good for those who love God (vs. 28), and there is nothing that can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord (vs. 39). Following Jesus is not easy, and Paul knows, as does the church in Rome at this time, that the likelihood of death by persecution is great, but through Christ Jesus, death does not have a hold on us. Life in Christ is life eternal.

We continue with parables in the Gospel of Matthew, reading parables about the kingdom of heaven in 13:31-33, 44-52. All of the parables remind us to hold fast to what is good and to let go of what is evil, and that at the end the angels will separate out the evil from the righteous. It is good to remember that all of us have the capacity for evil, that all of us are sinners, but that God desires to remove that sin from our lives, which is what Christ has come to do—to separate the wheat from the chaff, and burn the chaff. God desires for all of us to have sin and evil removed from our lives, and to cling to what is good—for the kingdom of heaven is worth giving up everything else for.

The kingdom, the reign of God, the kin-dom of Jesus—to live into this, we must be willing to give up the ways of this world. The social conventions and rules of this world require that we seek worldly success and fortune, and we work hard for it. The way of Christ calls us to empty ourselves, to seek the well-being of others, and to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. The way of the world says there are good people and there are bad people; the way of Christ reminds us that we all have to work on the sin within us, to seek forgiveness and reconciliation, in order that Christ may reign within our hearts.

Call to Worship (from Genesis 1:1-5 and John 1:1-5)

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,

 **In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God.**

Then God said, “Let there be light,”

 **What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.**

And God saw that the light was good,

 **The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.**

God created all things for good

 **Christ has come to make all things new. Let us celebrate and worship Christ together!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have put the ways of the world above You. We have sought worldly justice that favors punishment instead of Your justice that seeks for restoration. We have justified ourselves and our actions that harm others unintentionally. Forgive us for not seeking Your ways, for not living into Your covenant. Restore us to Your way of life, that we may live out Your commandments by loving our neighbors and seeking their needs above our desires and the conventions of the world. In the name of Christ, who has come to restore us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God sent Jesus because God loves you. Jesus lived and died because he loves you. Jesus lives again because love is stronger than anything. Love always wins out. Forgiveness always wins out. You are loved and forgiven by God. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, move through us and bind us together, that we might build up the body of Christ here on earth. Remind us that all of creation is from You; all human beings are created in Your image and are Your beloved children. Cleanse us from hate and strife, envy and greed, and restore in us compassion, justice and mercy. May we feel Your presence among us today and every day; guide our hands and feet to work for Your reign on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.