Worship Resources for July 28th—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Hosea 1:2-10 and Psalm 85; Genesis 18:20-32 and Psalm 138; Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Hebrews, 4:14-5:10 (Matthew 26:36-40)

The first selection in the Hebrew scriptures continues its series following the prophets, and next up is Hosea. This is a difficult book to translate because of the additions and changes scholars suspect have taken place in this book, adding layers of sayings and interpretations to the story of the prophet told in chapters 1-3. Hosea’s marriage to Gomer is seen as a metaphor for God’s marriage to Israel, and that Gomer is unfaithful to Hosea. Their children are given names that would be horrible names to give one’s children: “God sows,” “Not pitied,” “Not my people,” for the people have not been faithful to God. But God will restore the people to Israel and will give them a new name: “Children of the living God.”

The psalmist prays for deliverance on behalf of the people in Psalm 85. Recalling God’s acts of forgiveness in the past, the psalmist calls upon God to bring restoration. The psalmist pleads for revival, for God’s steadfast love, and to be granted salvation. The psalmist calls forth the image of marriage, of two coming together as steadfast love and faithfulness meet, and “righteousness and peace will kiss each other.” Faithfulness grows up and righteousness looks down. God brings all things together, and God will bless the people.

The second selection in the Hebrew scriptures continues chapter eighteen of Genesis, concluding from last week’s visit by the angels to Abraham. This time, because Abraham has turned the three angels away from going to Sodom, Abraham draws near to God and asks if God is going to destroy the righteous along with the wicked of that city. In this story, Abraham bargains with God, getting God to go from fifty to ten—if there are ten righteous people to be found, God will not destroy Sodom. However, we know that Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed in the next chapter.

Psalm 138 is a song of praise to God above other gods. God answered the call of the psalmist in their need. The psalmist sings that all kings will praise God and sing of God’s ways. When the psalmist was in times of trouble, God’s hand was with them, delivering them from their enemies. God’s steadfast love endures forever.

The Epistle selection continues in Colossians. The writer warns against human tradition and being “captive” by philosophy and elemental spirits—a warning against the culture and practices around them, and the teachings of worship of angels and other spirits that had begun to pop up in some other churches. Instead, in Christ, the fullness of the deity dwells bodily, for faith in Christ is an embodied faith. As some early church communities took on the practices of the people around them, the writer reminds them that the old practices they once left behind were crucified on the cross, and not to fall into their old ways. Instead, they are to hold on to Christ, who is the head of the church.

One of Jesus’ disciples asks him to teach them how to pray in Luke 11:1-13. Jesus teaches them part of what the Protestant church often calls the Lord’s Prayer. Following this, Jesus teaches about persistence, to continue to ask, search, and knock, for God gives good gifts to the children of God. Even though they have not always been faithful out of goodness, they at least are faithful when another is persistent.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series in Hebrews with 4:14-5:10, with Jesus as the High Priest. Jesus is the one who intercedes on behalf of all of us. Because he was without sin, he was truly able to make atonement. The writer links Jesus with the “order of Melchizedek,” an obscure priest mentioned once in Genesis 14 who came to Abraham, and then mentioned again in Psalm 110. Because Melchizedek’s mention is so brief, the story in Judaism was that Melchizedek didn’t die but was taken up by God along with other figures in the Hebrew scriptures. The writer links Jesus with this story and these scriptures, that Jesus comes from a priestly line more ancient than Aaron.

Jesus prays for himself in the garden of Gethsemane in Matthew 26:36-40, while three of his disciples, who accompanied him, fell asleep. Linked with the passage in Hebrews, this shows that Jesus prays to God for God’s will to be done, no matter what, as a priest ought to do.

God remains faithful, even when we do not. God is persistent in pursuing us, calling us back to recognize where we have come from, who we are as God’s children. God is so persistent that God came to us as one of us, to intercede on behalf of us, to live and die as one of us, and to show us that we all might have abundant life now and for eternity. There are other spiritualities and ways of life, but the Way of Christ is an embodied faith, one in which we are baptized with Christ, and Christ was baptized with us in the same river. Christ died as one of us, and we rise with Christ.

Call to Worship (from Luke 11:9-10)

So I say to you, “Ask, and it will be given you.”

 **“Search, and you will find.**

Knock, and the door will be opened for you.”

 **For everyone who asks will receive.**

Everyone who searches will find.

 **Everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.**

In this time of worship, may we seek God;

 **May we know God is reaching for us, now and always.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Seeking God, we confess that sometimes we’ve looked for the wrong things. We’ve sought after wealth. We’ve pursued worldly measures of success. We’ve clamored for worldly satisfaction, but have come up empty again and again. We desire more and more and are never fulfilled. Forgive us for not recognizing that You are pursuing our hearts. You are longing for us. You, O God, are still seeking us, from the wings of the morning to the farthest limits of the sea, and You have not given up on us. Forgive us for not seeking, searching, and desiring You. For in You we find refuge and rest. In You, we find Your steadfast love. Our needs are met as we care for the needs of others, as we love our neighbors as ourselves. Call us to repentance, to turn back to You, to know You are right here with us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (can be sung)
“Ask and it shall be given unto you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you. Allelu, Alleluia.”

God will never stop searching for you. Stop. Turn. Rest in the embrace of the Beloved One. Your sins are forgiven. Go, and seek to share the Good News, pursue peace by working for justice, and in all things, love one another. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of Life, breathe new life into us. Encourage our hearts, renew our resolve. The world threatens to squeeze the goodness of life out of us. Help us to expand our lungs, to breathe deep, to know Your love. Revive us, O God, in the pursuit of justice. Call us, O God, in the path of peace. Lead us, O God, in the work of reparation, reconciliation, and love. In the name of Christ, who called us into the life of the Spirit, we pray. Amen.