Worship Resources for July 29, 2018—Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Ruth, 2:1-23 (Luke 6:36-38)

Our first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures has taken us through the reign of Saul into the reign of David. In today’s selection, David, instead of going to war as the other kings around him are doing, is at home, wandering around on his roof and he spies Bathsheba bathing. He sends messengers to get her and he sleeps with her. It’s important to note that this is not consensual—due to David’s position of power, his sending of messengers to get her, there is no way she could say no. He sends her home, and later she tells him she is pregnant. David tries to get her husband Uriah to go sleep with her as soon as he comes back, but Uriah, being the good soldier, refuses to do so, and David sends a letter to his commander Joab to have Uriah put on the front line. He even has Uriah carry the letter, containing his death sentence, to Joab.

The psalmist writes that only fools doubt the existence of God in Psalm 14. In this psalm, attributed to David, the people have gone astray, and do not seek the wisdom of God. The psalmist calls them to turn back, because God is with the righteous, and God looks after the poor, and is the one who restores and brings deliverance.

The prophet Elisha feeds a hundred people with only twenty loaves of barley and some grain in 2 Kings 4:42-44. God told Elisha the people should eat, and though Elisha’s servant questioned him, the servant gave it to the people—and there were even leftovers.

This portion of Psalm 145 speaks to God’s abundance and faithfulness. The psalmist says the faithful will bless God, and God is the provider of all our needs. God is near to all who call upon God, and God is just and kind.

The Epistle reading continues to the Ephesians with 3:14-21. This prayer, inserted into this letter, prays that Christ will dwell in the hearts of the hearer, that they will be deeply rooted and grounded in faith and love, and that the listener will be strengthened with God’s Spirit. This ancient benediction reminds the receiver that God is the one who at work in us and is able to accomplish far more than we could ever think or imagine.

We turn to the Gospel according to John for the next few weeks. In 6:1-21, Jesus has come to a mountain near the Sea of Galilee just before Passover, and the crowds have followed him. Jesus asks his disciple Philip, “Where are we going to buy bread for all these people?” Philip is flabbergasted, because it would cost so much—way more than they have—to feed them all. Andrew finds a young boy with five barley loaves and two fish, but that’s not even really enough for the disciples to eat. But Jesus tells the disciples to have the crowds sit down. Jesus gives thanks for the food, and distributes it—and asks the disciples to gather the leftovers. However, the people afterwards want to take Jesus by force to make him king—so he leaves by himself. Later that evening, when the disciples go back across the lake, Jesus appears to them, walking on the water, but tells them not to be afraid.

The Narrative Lectionary continues through the book of Ruth with chapter two. Ruth and Naomi have arrived back in Bethlehem. Ruth desires to go and find work in the fields, and happens to find work in the field of Boaz, who was related to Naomi by marriage. Boaz notices her, and discovers that she is the young widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi, and is moved by what she has done for Naomi. He makes sure she is well fed and looks out for her well-being among the other male workers. Naomi, who was bitter following the deaths of her husband and sons, now blesses God for the kindness they have experienced, and shows gratitude for what Boaz has done for them both.

In part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Plain, after the Beatitudes, Jesus instructs his disciples on various things. In Luke 6:36-38, Jesus teaches that they ought to be merciful as God is merciful, not to judge or condemn others, and to forgive, and they will be forgiven.

Fear holds us back. Fear that others would find out the horrible atrocity David had committed against Bathsheba caused him to have Uriah killed. Fear caused the disciples to doubt that anything could be done for the people. Fear of the cost, fear that there wasn’t enough, fear that there were too many people to make a difference almost stopped the disciples. But a young boy wasn’t afraid to come forward with his five loaves and two fish, and Jesus wasn’t afraid that they would run out—but rather, had them sit down and told them to collect the leftovers. Ruth was not afraid to go to a foreign land with her mother-in-law, and was not afraid to look for work to provide for her, though she could have entered a very dangerous scenario. She was bold enough to do what needed to be done, and God provided for her and Naomi. When we let go of fear, and cling to hope, and trust in God, God will see us through. That doesn’t mean it will be easy, or that everything will be all right, but it means we will not be alone. Naomi was not alone because of Ruth. The disciples were not alone, because Jesus was with them, even when they were afraid.

Call to Worship

God is the one who makes a way in the sea;

 **God forges a path through the mighty waters**

God provides water in the wilderness,

 **And rivers in the desert.**

God makes a way where there was none before,

 **And God leads us through to the Promised Land**

Come, worship God, who continues to lead us on;

 **Worship God, who leads us to new life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess our fear. At times we allow fear to lead us rather than hope; doubt to drive us rather than trust. We make mistakes, and instead of confessing our mistakes and working to right our wrongs, we double-down. We refuse to acknowledge our wrongdoings because we are afraid. We have allowed fear to rule us instead of love, but Your love casts out fear. Your love calls us to renewed trust. Your love allows us to hope and to work together for goodness. We confess and acknowledge our fear, O God, and ask for Your help to overcome it. In the name of Christ, who faced the fear of death on the cross, and lives in us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

“Do not be afraid.” God speaks these words to us in Scripture time and again, and God speaks these words into our hearts. Know that you are forgiven for the times your fear has overwhelmed you. Know that you are loved. Know that you are not alone. Together, we can conquer our fears. Together, we can make a difference in this world. Together, we can do justice, begin healing, and bring hope to the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer

Trailblazing God, You have led us through the wilderness, through the waters, through the fires and beyond. You continue to make a way when the world has unjustly thrown us off course, when the walls of division are constructed to block us. You have taken us by the hand and led us forward where there was no path. You continue to call us by name even when we have been afraid to take those first steps. Though the danger is near, we will trust in You. Though the way is shrouded and veiled, we will listen for Your name. Though the path seems uncertain, we will continue to follow You, knowing that You lead us through the valley of the shadow and into freedom, into hope, and most of all, into Your eternal love. We will follow You. Amen