Worship Resources for July 30, 2017—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: Ephesians 4:1-16 (John 15:1-4)

Rebekah’s brother Laban proves to be as shrewd as Rebekah was in helping Jacob steal his father’s blessing. Jacob, Rebekah’s youngest of the twins, falls in love with Laban’s youngest daughter Rachel, but wanting to ensure his eldest daughter’s fortune, after Jacob agrees to work for Laban for seven years to marry Rachel, Laban tricks Jacob into sleeping with Leah. Laban explains why he did what he did—which is the opposite of what Rebekah did for Jacob—but Jacob is willing to work another seven years and marry Rachel, and takes both Leah and Rachel as his wives, along with their maids, who become the mothers of all his children.

Psalm 105:1-11, 45b calls the people into worship, to sing praise to God, and to remember God’s works in history. The covenant with Abraham is recalled, and the promises made to his descendants. This covenant was confirmed with Jacob, and the people are called to remember, give thanks and praise

Psalm 128 is a blessing for the family, perhaps a toast given at a wedding. The psalmist sings the blessing for the work, for the household, and for the wife and child of the man being blessed. The last line brings hope for a long and prosperous life before God.

In 1 Kings 3:5-12, God tells the new king Solomon that Solomon should ask for what God will give them. And Solomon asks for the ability to discern between good and evil. Solomon knows that being king is a grave responsibility, and though his father was a beloved king, his father made many mistakes. God is pleased by Solomon’s response, because it is not selfish—Solomon wants to do the right thing for the people of God.

The psalmist sings praise for God’s teachings in Psalm 119:129-136. The psalmist finds joy in their soul by following God’s ways through the ordinances and precepts, but seeks of God protection from human oppression. The psalmist asks for God’s aid so they might keep to God’s ways of life, and weeps when God’s ways are forgotten and not kept.

Paul’s chief argument in the letter to the Romans comes in 8:26-39. If God is for us, who can be against us? God is the one who will win out in the end. It is God who justifies the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles, Christ who will intercede on our behalf, the Spirit who helps us in our weakness. Because of this, there is no condemnation in Christ, and there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We continue reading the parables of Jesus in the Gospel according to Matthew. These passages all contain short parables about the kingdom, or reign of God. The mustard plant can be an invasive plant. It is a shrub. It is, not as Jesus says here, the smallest of seeds but it is very small, and yet can cause irrevocable change, and all who wander, including the birds of the air, can find a home there. The large amount of flour is leavened by a little yeast (and notice the one mixing is a woman—and it is God that does the mixing in our lives!) And again, no one would go and spend such an extravagant amount of money for an entire field for one little treasure, yet God created the whole universe and we are the treasure. We are the one perfect pearl that God has been searching for. And God is the one who sorts out evil from good, and will remove the evil from our very selves if we allow God to work on us.

The Narrative Lectionary continues in its series on Ephesians. In chapter 4, the writer speaks of the gifts of the Spirit, and the call to be one body in Christ. These gifts are to be used to build up the body of Christ, and we are called to grow into the body of Christ and not be swayed by every teaching out there, but rather, speak the truth in love and grow in our faith in Christ.

In John 15:1-4, Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine. Jesus is the true vine and we are the branches, but if we do not bear fruit, we will be removed. We must use our gifts and time to bear fruit of the vine, and God is the grower. We cannot bear fruit if we do not abide in the vine, and remember that we are part of the body of Christ, the true vine.

We are connected—the body of Christ, the vine and the branches. We have been taught by the wisdom of God what is good and right, and we are called to live into it. And Christ calls us to build up the reign of God, the community of faith, here on earth as it is in heaven. And it doesn’t always make sense. The ways of the world teach us to seek worldly measures of success. The way of Christ calls us to use everything we have for the kingdom, to be willing to give it all up for that one great treasure, that one great pearl, that life in Christ in which the first must become last of all and servant of all. In the teachings of the world, it doesn’t make sense; it is foolish. But for those who know Christ, we know this to be the way of life.

Call to Worship

God is the gardener, and Christ is the vine;

 **We are the branches who bear the fruits of the Spirit.**

Listen to the voice of the gardener, remember you are part of the vine;

 **Remember that you are interconnected, dependent upon one another as the body of Christ.**

Be nurtured by the Spirit, fed by the word of God;

 **Care for one another, for we are one in Christ.**

Come, worship God, who has planted good things in us.

 **Come, worship God, who has called us to be one in Christ.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Abba, Father, Parent, Mother: We confess before You we have not seen one another as siblings, children of God. We have seen one another as rivals. We have been jealous of one another, striving to have what others have. We have mistreated one another, neglecting those in need around us. We have failed one another, refusing to love those we see as enemies, refusing to seek the path of reconciliation, refusing to love our neighbor as ourselves. Forgive us, God of our mothers and fathers. Forgive us, Abba God. You have loved us as Your children, and You have called us to love one another as kindred in Christ. Forgive us, and bring us into the hard work of reconciliation, justice, mercy, and peace. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

As a nursing mother cannot forget her child, so God cannot forget us. Each one of our hairs on our head is accounted for. Each one of us is known by name and loved with a love we cannot understand. Know this: God loves you madly. God wants you to do the right thing. So do it. Seek forgiveness, walk in the ways of justice and peace, and do God’s healing work in the world. Amen.

Prayer

God who scatters seeds, You scattered the stars and the planets across the universe, then told our ancestors Abraham and Sarah that Your love was greater than this. You scattered Your seeds upon the earth, and told us that Your love was like the smallest of these seeds that would grow into a home for all who wander. You scattered Your seeds among creation and whispered to us that if we hold on to You, we will find our foundation in good soil and bring forth a harvest. Scatter Your seeds again, the seeds of hope, for we desperately need it. Nourish the seeds of hope with the gifts of the Spirit, and grow us into Your living hope for the world. In the name of Christ, who taught us to pray. Amen.