Worship Resources for July 5, 2020—Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67 and Psalm 45:10-17 or Song of Solomon 2:8-13; Zechariah 9:9-12 and Psalm 145:8-14; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Job, 41:1-8, 42:1-17

The first selection of the Revised Common Lectionary continues the story of the ancestors of the faith. These verses from Genesis 24 tell the story of how Rebekah came to be Isaac’s wife, after Isaac’s mother Sarah died, and Abraham was growing old. Abraham wanted to secure the future for his son, not wanting Isaac to marry among the Canaanites; so he sent his servant back to his father’s family to find a suitable partner for Isaac. When his servant found Rebekah, she showed kindness to him, giving him water and watering his camels. Rebekah’s father and brother asked her if she was willing to go, and she said yes, leaving her family of origin behind to travel far away and become Isaac’s wife.

Psalm 45 is a song for a royal wedding. In verses 10-17, the psalmist sings to the bride, giving her advice to remember that she is now the king’s wife, and that she will be blessed in this role. She is to show her loyalty and honor to the king, and the people will seek her favor. The psalmist concludes with a blessing; in the place known for ancestors, they will have sons—descendants—continuing the lineage and blessing of the nation.

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 is part of a royal love poem, the bride waiting for her bridegroom, who calls to her to come away, for winter is over, and springtime is the time of love, of fertility and flowers. Traditionally attributed to Solomon at his wedding, this passage sings of the joy of romantic love.

The second selection of the Revised Common Lectionary follows the prophets. This part of Zechariah speaks of the triumphal entry of the king that comes in the name of God—but not as they would expect. Instead of a warhorse, the king from God is humble, riding upon a donkey. This is the king that will end violence and bring peace. God will also free everyone imprisoned in death by the blood of the covenant and will bring hope to the people.

This portion of Psalm 145 contains an ancient confession of God’s goodness and mercy. All of creation is part of God’s faithful congregation. Creation speaks to God’s power and tells of the glories of God’s reign, an everlasting reign through all generations.

The Epistle readings continue through Romans, where Paul in chapter 7 writes about the inner conflict of sin. Paul is not against the law of God, but the law does nothing, in his view, to stop the influence of sin. Sin in itself is almost another law—the law of doing what you want because it feels good. The believer is caught between these two laws—and cannot live rightly because of it. The temptation of the law of sin is too great. Instead, it is Christ who rescues us from “this body of death”—the war of the two laws. Through Christ, the believer is freed from both.

In Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30, Jesus speaks of the faithlessness of the people around him. They rejected John the Baptist, saying he must have a demon, he must be possessed, he must be out of his mind because he came out of the wilderness and preached against the ways of the world, and called people into repentance. Jesus, preaching and proclaiming the same things, but choosing to be among the people, including eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors—they called him a glutton and a drunkard. Jesus concludes that portion saying that “Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” It’s about what we do that will last, not what people say about us. In verses 25-30, Jesus prays, giving thanks for God’s wisdom that was not revealed to those considered wise and intelligent, but to those who are simple, to children. Those who know Jesus know God. Jesus then speaks as Wisdom, calling the people to come to him, to learn from him, to hand over the burdens of the world and follow him. The way to God is through Jesus, and in Jesus, we find rest for our souls.

The Narrative Lectionary concludes its series on Job. In Job 41:1-8, God speaks to Job about Leviathan, the chaos monster of middle eastern mythology. Who can catch and tame Leviathan? If so, can Leviathan make a covenant with you? Only God makes covenants, only God can keep the chaos of the world at bay. Job responds to God in 42:1-7, withdrawing his complaint from the heavenly courtroom. Job recognizes he was in over his head—not comprehending the vastness of God’s responsibilities with creation and taming chaos, how awe-some God is, and Job repents. In verse 7, God turns to Job’s friends, who accused Job of having done something wrong. Even though God’s strong response caused Job to repent of even asking the question, God does not hold Job guilty. Job was still right, because he did not blame, he just wanted answers. Job’s only fault was not understanding God, but God does not hold it against him.

“The fear [awe] of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” the psalmist writes in Psalm 111:10a. Knowing that God is beyond what we can comprehend is the beginning of our understanding. It is the beginning of drawing into a deeper relationship with God that leads us in our way of life. It begins with humility: who are we in the vastness of the universe God has created? And yet, God knows us, takes notice of our suffering, hears our cries, and works for justice in our lives and world. How we live our lives reflects our understanding of God. Too often we have simplistic understandings of a God of judgment and wrath, following simple patterns of doing good and avoiding bad. God invites us into a deeper way in which our lives reflect the justice, mercy, and love shown to us through Jesus Christ. It is a way in which God’s presence is very much known to us, and yet beyond us.

Call to Worship (from Matthew 11:28-30)

**Jesus said,**

**"Come to me, all you that are weary,**

**and are carrying heavy burdens,**

**and I will give you rest.”
Take my yoke upon you,**

**and learn from me;**

**for I am gentle and humble in heart,**

**and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy,**

**and my burden is light."**

**Come, let us worship God,**

**And may we find rest and renewal**

**In Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess to You we want the easy answers, the shortcuts, the quickest way to get what we want with minimal sacrifice. The ways of this world tempt us toward an easier life, in which we do not care about others, only our own desires. Forgive us for these desires that are not Yours. Call us into Your way of life, a way that seeks justice for the oppressed, relief for the suffering, inclusion and welcome for the marginalized. Guide us into Your way of life, a way of deep listening, of seeking truth even when it painfully strips away our illusions. Keep us to the path of knowledge and insight, knowing that You are with us, always. In the name of Christ, who showed us this Way, this Truth, and this Life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Psalm 23)

God is our Good Shepherd, who leads us to green pastures and still waters. God is by our side in the valley of the shadow, and God is the one who prepares a table before us. Our cup overflows with grace, mercy, forgiveness, and healing. Go forth, knowing that goodness and mercy are with you all the days of your life, and you will dwell with God forever. Amen.

Prayer

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, heaven and earth are full of Your glory. How small we are, in the vastness of the universe You created! Yet You created us in Your image, gave us hearts to love, minds to understand, bodies to live and explore. You fill us with Your Spirit in every breath we take. We cannot begin to understand You, and yet we continue to grasp at straws. Draw us into the deeper way of life You intend for us, a life of wisdom, insight, knowledge, and exploration. A life that pursues justice, practices mercy, and lives in humility, knowing we can never fully understand or know You, yet You are with us and know us. We give You thanks and praise, our quiet questions and musings, and lift them all to You, O God. Amen.