Worship Resources for July 6th—Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

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

In the United States this is Independence Day Weekend (July 4th); Canada Day is July 1st. While secularly we may celebrate our nationality and patriotism, this is a good Sunday to celebrate diversity and the reign of Christ, to preach the Good News of the Peace of Christ among all nations.

We begin with a choppy mess of Scripture from Genesis 24 that contains the story of Isaac meeting Rebekah and ensuring the promise of God through Abraham’s family. While this marriage, like most in the Bible, is about property rights being maintained in the family, Rebekah is given the choice: “Will you go with this man?” and she responds, “I will.” She is willing to leave her home and family and go with a stranger to a man she has never met who will become her husband. What is Rebekah’s motivation? Is it for adventure? Is it out of familial duty that she chooses this? Or does Rebekah trust this man’s words and that there is a future for her in this new place with people she does not know?

Zechariah 9:9-12 is the prophet’s praise for the return from exile, and that the ideal king who shall lead them will not ride in on a white horse, proud and triumphant, but humble, riding on a donkey. This king will end the battles, stop the wars, and bring peace. This king uses nonviolence, unlike the kings of the past. Verse 9 is an image for Christians that is used on Palm Sunday, a reminder of Jesus with this image of humility when Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a donkey, and we are reminded of Jesus, who did not bring violence, and taught that those who live by the sword die by the sword.

Psalm 45:10-17 is the second half of a wedding song. Verses 1-9 are for the groom, verses 10-17 are for the bride. In echoing back to the story of Rebekah in the Genesis passage, we remember a time when marriages may mean a bride will never see her family again. In this case, for a royal wedding, the bride would be marrying into another nation. She is praised, but she is also called upon to forget her family, and to look to her king, her husband, as the one to serve.

Psalm 145:8-14 sings the praises of God who is faithful, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. The psalmists praises God who fulfills our needs and lifts up those who are struggling God is just and merciful and cares for us, watching over us.

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 also contains a love song for a wedding, but different from Psalm 45 in that this song is about the joy of love rather than one’s bridal duties and role. Love is connected to spring, to fertility, to joy, and the singer sings of her beloved and desires to be with them.

Romans 7:15-25a contains Paul’s words of his own struggle with sin. Paul knows that sin dwells within him, the desire to revolt against God, and that he cannot overcome it on his own, but through Jesus Christ he has victory. Under Paul’s understanding, the law was there to prevent sin, but since he cannot will himself to stop sinning, he cannot fulfill the law, and so he gives thanks for Jesus Christ who has abolished the law and conquered sin.

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 shares Jesus’ frustration with the people around him and compares it to a childhood taunt, in that he does not do what the people want and expect him to do. John the Baptist, a prophet came, but instead of listening to him, they labeled him dangerous, that he had a demon, because he preached a gospel of repentance and they didn’t want to hear it. Now that Jesus has come, they dismiss him as a drunk fool, because he has come to be among them, especially the ones they have rejected. We do this to our prophets all the time—we dismiss them for being foolish, or we lock them up for being dangerous. Jesus reminds us that “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” (vs. 19b). When we look at Jesus, we are reminded of his actions: preaching good news to the poor, eating with sinners and tax collectors, healing the sick, lifting up the lowly, bringing in those who have been oppressed and sent to the margins. This is the work of God. The second half of this passage is Jesus’ prayer for those who follow him, because the path is difficult, but Jesus promises that they will find rest in him. Those that should be in the know—the religious and political leaders—don’t get it because they don’t want to. They despise and reject and label. The ones who do understand are the ones who need the Good News the most, and Jesus promises that those who learn from him will find rest.

Following Jesus is not easy—we all know this, but when popular political leaders claim to be followers of Jesus and then do everything in their power that is contrary to Jesus—cutting off the poor from resources, separating children from parents under unjust immigration laws, and ignoring the health crisis around us, especially in the form of environmental degradation—we must be willing to risk being fools for Christ, to either be locked up as demonic or dismissed as foolish. Because we have been given wisdom by God, and our actions do speak louder than words. Do we follow Jesus by quoting the scriptures we like, or do we follow Jesus by truly loving our neighbor as ourselves?

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

Come to Jesus, all who are weary and burdened,

**Come to the One who gives us rest.**

Take the yoke of Jesus upon you,

**Learn from Jesus, who is gentle and humble.**

You will find rest for your souls in Jesus,

**Lay down your burdens upon Christ.**

Come to this time of worship,

**May you find peace, may you be uplifted, and may you know Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy Jesus, we confess to You that we have not loved our neighbor as ourselves. We have labeled them crazy, junkie, illegal, sick, and criminal. By our labels we have dismissed them and washed our hands clean of needing to care for them, let alone love them. We have broken Your greatest commandment. Forgive us for not seeing our fellow citizen in the reign of God, our brother, our sister, our family in You. Forgive us for not loving, as You have loved us. In Your name we pray and seek forgiveness. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is love, and when we abide in God’s love, God abides in us. In Christ we are loved and forgiven. Repent, and believe in the Good News, that there is no where you can turn away from God’s presence and love. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God we are always in Your presence, we are always surrounded by Your love. Guide us in our actions as well as our words to live out Your commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. On this Sunday in particular, may we remember that we are citizens of a greater realm, where You reign forever, and that the law of Your reign is to love one another. May we see all people as our brothers and sisters in You. May we see all people as Your beloved, as You see us. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.