Worship Resources for July 8, 2018—Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 and Psalm 48; Ezekiel 2:1-5 and Psalm 123; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13

Narrative Lectionary: Series on 1 John, 4:1-6 (John 14:15-17)

Our first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures in this season after Pentecost follows the rise of the kings of Israel. Saul is now dead, and David is anointed king at Hebron over the tribes of Israel. The elders who were loyal to Saul now pledge their loyalty to David and make a covenant with him, and later, David reigns over all of Israel and Judah in Jerusalem.

Psalm 48 is a song praising God for the city of Jerusalem, calling Mount Zion God’s holy mountain. In a time of polytheism, where the Canaanite gods were seen as inhabiting the nearby mountains, God is seen as the God of Mount Zion, of the city of Jerusalem, the city where God dwells and where kings tremble.

In the second selection of the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Ezekiel is called by God. God’s spirit enters Ezekiel and he is called to speak on behalf of God to a rebellious and stubborn people. God tells Ezekiel it’s not on him whether or not the people listen—either way, they will know that a prophet is now among them.

The psalmist in Psalm 123 invokes the image of a handmaiden looking to her mistress as the people look up to God in heaven for help. This short psalm pleads for mercy from God, for a relief from the taunts and contempt of their enemies. The psalmist looks only to God, for only God can grant mercy.

The writer of 2 Corinthians—presumably Paul—speaks of a vision of the “third heaven”—and the person he speaks of is probably himself. In this vision, he heard things and saw things that he cannot repeat, or probably even explain, but he has a “thorn in his flesh.” Something that is persistently bothering him, that he is not able to rid himself of, that keeps him from being too proud. Paul is sharing that even he is not perfect, that he struggles with weakness, but he knows that God’s grace is sufficient for him.

The Gospel lesson comes from Mark 6:1-13, where Jesus returns to his hometown and teaches in the synagogue. But while he is there, he is scoffed at. They all know him, know he is Mary’s son, that he is simply a carpenter. They know his family and where he grew up. They don’t believe him because they think they know him. He’s not good enough, not educated enough. And because they don’t believe him, they don’t experience any of the miracles or teachings that he was known for elsewhere, except for a few sick people who came to him. Instead, he sends out his disciples to the neighboring villages, two by two, giving them authority to cast out unclean spirits—but they can’t take anything with them. They have to rely on the kindness of strangers and their hospitality. If those villages don’t welcome them, they aren’t to make a big deal of it—shake the dust off their sandals and move on. But where they are welcomed, there they to teach, heal, and proclaim the Gospel.

The Narrative lectionary continues its series on 1 John, this time with 4:1-6. The writer warns the listeners to test the spirits to see whether they are from God. In other words, those who speak with the Holy Spirit will speak in truth of Christ. For a community in conflict with the Gnostics, they will know others are with Christ if they speak of Christ’s divinity as well as his humanity. Other voices are not from God.

Jesus declares in John 14:15-17 that those who love him keep his commandments, and the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, will come to be with them forever. The world does not receive the Advocate because they do not see or know the Spirit, but they do, because God already abides in them.

God is speaking to us, in the past, in the present, and God still has something to say to us. But we often do not want to hear it. We don’t want to hear how we have conformed to the ways of the world and we don’t want to hear that we must change. We don’t want to hear the cries of injustice, we’d rather just try to live a good life. But there are prophets all around. The Spirit is at work. If we believe in God, we must remember the prophet’s cry on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed. We must listen to the Spirit of truth that calls us to see one another as part of God’s beloved family—we must see each other’s humanity. We must remember the commandment to love God cannot be fulfilled if we do not love our neighbor as ourselves.

Call to Worship

The Spirit of the Lord is upon us,

**God has called us to bring good news to the poor.**

God has sent us to proclaim release to the captives,

**God has called us to let the oppressed go free.**

God is telling us that now is the time,

**Even if some won’t listen to us.**

Now is the time,

**Even if the words are hard to proclaim.**

Now is the time,

**Even when we tremble and are afraid.**

Now is the time,

**To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we confess that we have conformed to the ways of the world. We have sought worldly comfort over the needs of others. We have pursued worldly success over living into Your ways. We have loved those who love us, instead of loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us. Forgive us. Call us into Your ways of justice and mercy. Call us to work for healing and restoration. Call us to repent where we have gone wrong. Call us back to Your way, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to remind us that we cannot love You without loving others. In the strong name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s grace is sufficient for us. There is nothing we can do to earn it or deserve it. But despite our flaws and faults, God’s grace is always there. God’s peace is always within. God’s love always surrounds you, enfolds you, and embraces you. God’s grace is sufficient for you. You are forgiven, loved, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Prophets, You called them to speak even when no one would listen. You called them to cry out even when others turned their backs. You called them to work for justice even when they were humiliated, thrown in jail, and killed. You are calling us now, to speak on behalf of children, to speak on behalf of immigrants, to speak on behalf of those who are oppressed, to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak. Give strength to our voices, and remind us we are not alone. Your Spirit is within us, already at work in us, and together, we are stronger. Together, we know Your love has no limits. Together, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Amen.