Worship Resources for August 11, 2013—Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 1:1, 10-20 or Genesis 15:1-6; Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23 or Psalm 33:12-22; Luke 12:32-40; Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

We hear the call of Isaiah and the cry of God for the poor and the oppressed in our first Old Testament thread, in which we hear the prophets who had stood up for God’s ways when it was not popular and at great risk to their own lives. Isaiah preaches against the excesses of the wealthy ruling elite, who had turned away from God and were turning to the gods of the peoples around them, observing their festivals and rituals, all at the same time ignoring the poor, the widows and the orphans among them. With the prophets, the turning away from worship of God and the rise of injustice towards people on the margins goes hand in hand. The call for justice is echoed in the cry for returning to worship of God.

In Genesis 15, we return to the covenant of God with Abram and Sarai. In our second thread of the Hebrew Scriptures this season after Pentecost, we are reminded of God’s faithfulness through God’s covenant. Abram thinks it is impossible at this point. He and Sarai are very old, and Abram is concerned about the continuation of his legacy—a common concern of his day and throughout Biblical history, and even in parts of the world still today—how property is passed down becomes the main concern of one’s existence, because it isn’t very long. Abram needs an heir, and it doesn’t appear Sarai will be able to have a child. But God promises Abram and Sarai that their needs will be met, and their descendants will be more numerous than they can count. It is a promise that they did not see fully realized in their lifetime, but were given a glimpse of their future with hope.

Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23 sings of the kind of sacrifice God wants—a sacrifice of thanksgiving. We give not to please an angry God, but we give because God has given us so much—we give out of thanksgiving, not out of fear. This is the sacrifice God desires of us.

Psalm 33:12-22 is a song of blessing for those who follow and trust in God. When we put our trust in worldly powers, they will fail us, but God is faithful. God is the one who made all of creation, why do we look to created beings to save us? God is the one we wait for, who will be faithful in the end.

Luke 12:32-40 contains a brief parable about being ready and waiting for Christ to come in a new way. Paired with the parable of the Rich Fool from last week, we once again are reminded that living for the ways of the world is foolish. Living for our own gain, our own success, our own wealth leads to ruin. One fault that many Christians have is that we believe in life after death, and so we live this life as if it was completely second from the next. Instead, Christ proclaims eternal life, in that our lives lived now prepare us for eternity. Christ tells us to be last of all and servant of all. Christ tells us to store up treasures in heaven, not worldly pleasures. Unfortunately, many have missed this message, living for the moment, ignoring the ones who need to be served, and instead, expecting to be served ourselves.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 reminds us of the great examples of faith of our ancestors, of Abraham and Sarah. “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (vs. 1) and we are reminded that Abraham and Sarah did not see the fulfillment of God’s promise to them, but had a glimpse through the birth of their son, Isaac. So we must live with this faith: God has promised us a future with hope, God has given us the hope of eternal life through Jesus the Christ. But we may not see the fulfillment in our lifetime, but through our faith, we leave a legacy for future generations. When we are faithful, future generations will look upon our faith and find endurance, and may even see the promises made to us fulfilled. So don’t lose heart.

Endurance. Perseverance. We are reminded that we may not see the fulfillment of God’s promises in our lifetime. All too often, we put our own worldly hopes and dreams in front of God’s promises, believing that God fulfills promises by blessing people with wealth, health and happiness. This could not be further from the Gospel of Jesus, who told the rich to sell all they had, who told the disciples not to take more than they could carry and to rely on the generosity of others, who told us all to become first we must become last of all and servant of all. This is what Jesus has called us to do—to seek eternity, we must not be wedded to the wealth and success of this world, for it will fall away. Our lives are a witness to the future: did we seek to live for Christ by living for others, or did we seek to live for ourselves?

Call to Worship (from Lamentations 3:22-26)

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases

**God’s mercies shall never come to an end**

They are new every morning

**Great is God’s faithfulness**

The Lord is our God

**All our hope is in God**

For all those whose souls seek God

**God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

**Come, let us worship our steadfast and faithful God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Merciful God, we come to You in need of tender care. Our hearts have been trampled on by the ways of the world. We have followed worldly desires that have led us feeling more empty than before. Bind up our broken hearts. Lift us up gently from the ruts of life and lead us back to the smooth paths that lead us to green pastures and still waters. Softly and tenderly You call us by name, leading us away from the darkness in the world to Your light. Help us to hear Your voice above the distracting noise of the rat race around us. In the name of Jesus our Shepherd we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. Though the shadows grow long, we can feel God beside us in the darkness. We are not alone, and God remains faithful, through darkness into light. We have been forgiven, and we live in the promise of eternal life. Live knowing God is with you, always. Amen.

Prayer

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, you sent us the Prophets of Old to show us Your ways, to turn away from worldly desires of power and wealth and to live our lives in ways that honor and lift up others, seeing each other as brother and sister. Instead, we have focused on the profits of today, profits spelled with an f—profits over people, corporations over individuals. The wealthy are getting richer and those who live in poverty are becoming far too numerous. If we are to truly follow You, Christ who emptied himself on the cross, so we must empty ourselves of our selfish ways, and seek to follow You, lifting up the poor and the marginalized, working to bring people out of poverty. Guide us to seek Your ways when the ways of the world are so stifling and oppressing that it is hard to feel Your presence. Keep us to Your promises of eternal life, so that we may live this life fully for You by living for others. In Your name we pray. Amen.