Worship Resources for August 12, 2018—Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 and Psalm 130; 1 Kings 19:4-8 and Psalm 34:1-8; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Ruth, 4:1-22 (Luke 1:46-55)

Our first selection in the Hebrew Scriptures, following the rise of the Kings of Israel, skips ahead in David’s story to the death of his son Absalom. Absalom had killed David’s other son Amnon, Absalom’s half-brother, after Amnon had raped Tamar. Tamar was Amnon’s half-sister and Absalom’s full-blood sister. Because Amnon was in line for the throne, Absalom’s actions were seen as treason to the crown, even though David loved Absalom. When Absalom is killed, it is a military victory for David, but he grieves the loss of his son.

The psalmist cries out to God in Psalm 130, a psalm of lament. The psalmist pleads for God to listen, for they have remained faithful, and their soul is in waiting for God. The psalmist calls upon the people to put their hope in God, for God is faithful and will redeem them.

In our second selection from the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet Elijah in 1 Kings 19:4-8 is ready to give up. He’s ready to just fall down and die. But God twice tells him to get up and eat, and keeps him going, even though he doesn’t want to, even though he is despairing. But God remains steadfast and faithful, and Elijah endures.

Psalm 34:1-8 is a psalm of praise to God, thanksgiving for deliverance for the people. These first eight verses reveal the psalmist’s experience, that God has answered their prayers and delivered them, and so the psalmist calls upon the people to turn to God. God is the one who provides protection, and those who seek God will find satisfaction and joy.

The Epistle reading continues in the letter to the Ephesians, in 4:25-5:2. The writer instructs the readers in the ways of Christian life, to imitate God, for they are children of God. To turn away from the ways of the world, putting away bitterness and slander, to be angry but to not let that anger consume them (“be angry but do not sin”). Instead, they are called to remember that they are neighbors of one another, and the writer implies that neighbors goes beyond the church community, but to all people, as they share and speak the truth. As Christ gave himself up, so they ought to live in love, be kind and tenderhearted toward one another.

The Gospel according to John continues Jesus’ discourse about the bread from heaven. We ought to remember that the Johannine community was also Jewish, and when the author refers to “the Jews” he was referring to a specific community they were in disagreement with. We also do well to remember that these texts have been used to justify anti-Semitism within the church. Some scholars prefer to exchange the term with “some religious leaders” or “some community members” as a more accurate translation for today’s context. The community members complaining here knew Jesus very well—they knew his family, knew he was the son of Joseph. The words that Jesus spoke angered them because in their mind, someone sent by God would have come from a fancier place than Galilee. It wouldn’t be someone who’s always been part of them! But here Jesus was, telling them that the way to life is through faith, not through the food they work for. The manna given in the wilderness did not keep the people from dying, but faith in God will give them eternal life. Jesus declares that he is the living bread, the bread of life, and that it is through faith one has eternal life.

The Narrative lectionary concludes its series on Ruth with chapter four. Boaz meets with the family member who is the closest next-of-kin to Ruth’s deceased husband. The man is eager to inherit property, but does not want to have it pass out of his name, which it would if he married Ruth. Because Ruth’s husband died without Ruth having any children, the firstborn child of her next relationship, within the family, would be seen as the son of her deceased husband. Property would pass on in his name. This was a concern for the man that was next-of-kin, but not for Boaz. He had become fond of Ruth, and was willing to have the property pass on in Ruth’s husband’s name. He marries Ruth, and she conceives and has a son, and Naomi rejoices. Even though the property may have been in Ruth’s deceased husband’s name, the story lived on, and we know the son as Obed, the son of Boaz, and Obed became the grandfather of King David.

Mary’s Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55 is the supporting passage for the story of Ruth, a song of praise from Mary. Mary sings this song of praise to God in honor of her unborn child, conceived by the Holy Spirit. This song is of God’s ways of justice, who lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things and send the rich away empty. This is not good news for those who are powerful, but it is for those who have faced marginalization and injustice. Sung by an unwed young mother, we can feel the courage of God that is in her, that does not allow her to be outcast as society certainly would have, but instead, declares her the mother of the son of God.

“Leap and the net will appear” is often attributed as a Buddhist saying, but we all know that living by faith can be difficult. But it is how faith works—we struggle with our doubts and uncertainties, but we say we believe, help our unbelief, as we step forward in faith. Jesus calls us to believe that death does not have power over us, that sin no longer has a hold on us. Jesus calls us to not put our faith in the earthly bread we eat, but to know that God is the one who satisfies us, who gives us eternal life. Ruth put her faith in Naomi and trusted that Boaz would treat her well. Elijah, though he wanted to fall down and die, found himself getting up, and was able to keep going (even though he tried so hard to give up!) Even in the songs of lament, there is still hope in God. Having faith is difficult to describe, but it’s that ability to get up when we really hope to just fall down and have it over with.

Call to Worship

There are times when we feel like giving up,

 **Help us to give our burdens over to You, O God.**

There are times when we don’t want to go on,

 **Help us to find endurance in You, O God.**

There are times when we think nothing will ever change,

 **Help us to trust in You, O God.**

There are times when our faith is fragile,

 **Help us to grow in our faith, O God.**

We come together in this time of worship,

 **Our spirits are renewed in Christ our Savior.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Spirit of Hope, we come before You confessing that at times we’ve given up. We’ve thrown in the towel, we’ve assumed there is nothing that can be done, and the only people we can save are ourselves. Renew Your spirit in us, O God. Fill us with Your love, that we might love one another. Fill us with Your hope, that we might see that even our small acts of kindness can bring change. Fill us with Your peace, that we might know You are always with us. Renew our spirits, O God, so we may do the work You have given us to do. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The scriptures tell us that God’s faithfulness endures forever. The scriptures tell us to wait for God, to take heart. The scriptures tell us that it isn’t easy to wait, but joy will come, and that the wait is worth it. Know that God’s love is with you, and you can never be lost or forgotten. You are forgiven, renewed, and restored. Go in peace, and serve God.

Prayer

God of Steadfast Love, though the seasons are beginning to change, Your love remains constant. Though the news in the world is despairing, You breathe hope into us. Though we are afraid, Your presence remains with us. Renew us and restore us when we falter and fail. Help us to reach out and encourage others on the journey of faith. Remind us that we are not alone. God of Steadfast Love, Your faithfulness endures forever. Amen.