Worship Resources for August 13, 2017—Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28 and Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; 1 Kings 19:9-18 and Psalm 85:8-13; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Sacraments: Baptism, Psalm 46; Acts 2:37-42, or Series on Revelation, Revelation 4:1-11 (John 17:1-5)

We move in our history of the Hebrew people from Jacob’s generation to the generation of his children, focusing on Joseph. Joseph earned the ire of his brothers by proclaiming his dreams to them. Joseph was the second to the youngest, almost the bottom of the hierarchy, and yet he had visions of God’s greatness that included him. But Joseph also reported to his father his brother’s actions, and they despised him. They tore the robe his father gave him, and they wanted to kill him. Reuben, the eldest, talked them out of killing him. Judah, another of the elder sons, talked the others into selling him into slavery, thinking to be rid of him, but Joseph found that God’s dreams never left him.

Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b sings of how God was faithful to the people of Israel, and uses Joseph as a metaphor of God’s faithfulness even in the harshest of times. God used Joseph to prepare the people for the famine. God does not abandon the people, just as God did not abandon Joseph, and God raises up leaders for the people, unlikely heroes who lead with God’s wisdom.

Elijah is at the end of his rope in 1 Kings 19:9-18. He is struggling, and he is tired. He believes he is alone in speaking out for God’s ways, and that all others have abandoned God. This is not true—at the end of chapter 18, there are others who are faithful; however, we have all felt like Elijah, like we are the only ones. Elijah wants to give up, but God comes to him. God is not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire—not in the chaos of the world around him—but in the silence. Once Elijah recognized God’s presence, he wrapped his face in his mantle and came before God (tradition holds that one could not look upon the face of God and live). And there, God announces that Elijah shall anoint new kings to rule, and a new prophet to take Elijah’s place. God has not forgotten Elijah, and has brought him help and hope.

The psalmist sings of God’s faithfulness in Psalm 85:8-13. God brings peace and righteousness, and there is a bounty in God’s harvest of justice and truth. God’s salvation is at hand for all who follow in God’s ways and hold God in awe.

There is nothing we can do to earn God’s love and salvation, as Paul declares in Romans 10:5-15. We cannot be Christ and ascend into heaven, or descend into the depths. What we can do is accept that Christ is Lord, that Christ is the one who has done all of this for us. Rather, we are called to proclaim it. Proclaim what God has done through Jesus Christ our Lord. The word of faith is inside of us, and God is the one sending us out.

Jesus went away to pray by himself in Matthew 14:22-33, but when he returns to the disciples, they do not recognize him. They are out on a boat, and they see him coming across and think he is a ghost. Peter says, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come out of the boat.” Jesus does so, and Peter begins to walk to Jesus on the water. But Peter (who is always a little wishy-washy) begins to have doubts and begins to sink, and cries out to Jesus to save him. “Ye of little faith,” Jesus says to Peter, and to all of us. We would like to think we are faithful, that we are confident, but we question God’s ways and then doubt God’s presence, just as Peter did.

The Narrative Lectionary has two choices for the final series of the summer: Sacraments, or Revelation. The passages on Baptism begins with Psalm 46. The psalmist sings of our hope in God’s faithfulness, who is with us in the roughest of seas. There is a river, the psalmist declares, whose steams make glad the city of God, and God is in the midst of the city. The city and river refer to Jerusalem as well as the hope of a new Jerusalem, in which the water of life flows through.

Following Peter’s proclamation on the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:37-42, the people who hear Peter’s testimony, now recognizing through Peter Jesus as the Christ, ask Peter what they ought to do, and Peter declares they ought to be baptized. The scripture tells us that about 3000 were saved, and following this, the newly baptized began to live in community, serve one another, break bread together, and have the goodwill of all the people.

John of Patmos, after specific mentions of the seven churches of Asia, goes deeper into his vision of the heavenly throne room, into the lavish descriptions of the thrones and the elders who sit upon them, as well as the creatures from Ezekiel’s vision. All come before God to praise God, who is greater than all of this beauty and awesomeness and wonder.

In John 17:1-5, Jesus prays for God to glorify the Son. Through the gift of eternal life, we may know God. Jesus glorified God by finishing the work Christ began. Jesus asks God to glorify him with the glory that he had in the presence of God before the world began.

At times we do not see the glory of God. We do not see the wonders of God’s works around us. We see only the harshness of the world, the chaos, the challenges in front of us. We do not notice God’s presence with us. Sometimes, it is only in the stillness that we can find God. Sometimes, it is only in the realization that we cannot move forward alone that we recognize God is with us. And sometimes, despite all the evil in the world, we still find ways of trusting that God will see us through. We cling to that trust, that somehow, love will see us through.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 100)

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth!

**Worship the Lord with gladness; come before God with joyful songs.**

Know that the Lord is God.

**It is God that made us, and we belong to God.**

We are the people of God;

**We are the sheep of God’s pasture.**

Enter God’s gates with thanksgiving! Enter the Lord’s courts with praise!

**Give thanks to God and praise God’s name.**

For the Lord is good;

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

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Ever-present God, we confess that at times we don’t feel You. At times, we don’t see the goodness, or experience the joy of Your presence. At times hope slips through our fingers. Guide us back to You, O God, and help us to put our trust in You by trusting in Your presence among Your body in Christ. Help us to reach out to one another in our own times of need and struggle. Help us to share with one another our own burdens and vulnerabilities. Help us to seek prayer and encouragement. When our own wells feel dry, fill them, O God, and help us to reach out to others, to pray, to help, to encourage, and to love; for in being living hope for others, we find hope for ourselves. For this hope comes from You, through the love of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s steadfast love endures forever, and as long as we love one another, we know God’s love for us. When your well is dry, love. When you feel despair, help another. When you feel the weight of oppression, cry out for justice. Know that God is with you, and the body of Christ is with you, and the power of the Spirit is with you. Know that you are renewed and restored, and beloved of God. Amen.

Prayer

Star-Shaper and World-Maker, we come before You in awe of Your works of creation. We cannot count the stars, yet You have made them all. We cannot count the grains of sand, yet You have made them all. Refill in us the sense of wonder and joy at Your universe. Replenish in us the love and joy of being Your children. Guide us with wisdom to seek the knowledge of the universe, so that we might understand and appreciate all that You have given us, and work to care for this planet, this one Earth, so that all may live and love. Amen.