Worship Resources for August 14, 2016—Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 5:1-7 or Jeremiah 23:23-29; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19 or Psalm 82; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

Narrative Lectionary: The Lord’s Prayer, Luke 11:2-4

Isaiah tells a parable of a vineyard in chapter five, a vineyard dug and planted and cared for, but the vineyard has produced wild grapes. They have not grown as they were intended, and do not care for what was prepared for them, so the planter will remove the hedge and allow it to be demolished and neglected. The parable shows that the people have turned away from what God intended for them, and they will bear the consequences of their actions.

Jeremiah 23:23-29 scorns the prophets who have lied in God’s name, because God declares that God is always near. Those who prophesy for God will find the word of God burning inside them. God will uncover the untruths, the hidden secrets, and the false prophets will give way to the truth, because the truth cannot be hidden. God is near.

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19 calls upon God to restore the vineyard, recognizing that the people have gone astray. The psalmist calls upon God for protection, for God is the one who brought the vine out of Egypt and planted it. The psalmist asks God to give them life, to restore the people, and they will call upon God’s name.

Psalm 82 (also a lectionary choice from July 10th) speaks of God being above all gods. In the worldview at that time, nations had individual gods, but the people of Israel believed that their God was the Creator of all, the Judge of all, and God has come to judge the earth, to execute justice and rescue the oppressed.

Hebrews 11:29-12:2 continues the discourse of the writer, beginning each statement with “By Faith,” and a story of one of the ancestors of faith, from Moses through all of the prophets. The writer states that these are the cloud of witnesses who surround us—the faithful who remind us to persevere, for above all, Christ endured and persevered for us. Through Christ’s perseverance, we have victory.

Luke 12:49-56 is a difficult passage from Jesus about how he came not to bring peace but division. Jesus’ coming is divisive. Jesus proclaims a baptism, and this baptism is controversial. Those who followed Jesus were often disowned by their families. They were making a choice to leave the traditions they had known behind, and to join together in something new. By the time Luke’s account of the Gospel was written, the church fully included Gentile believers, which would have been a scandal in the time of Jesus, but this is where the church was leading—and it would cause division.

The Narrative Lectionary begins a four-week study of three verses in Luke: The Lord’s Prayer.

(Because these three verses are the same for the next four weeks, I will be repeating this reflection).

Luke’s account is very short and doesn’t include all of the words Protestants use in the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. All Jesus includes is this: Father, hallowed be your name (God our Parent/Father: your name is holy). Your Kingdom Come (God’s beloved community, God’s kin-dom, God’s reign, come). Give us each day our daily bread (fulfill our daily needs). And forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone indebted to us (forgive others because you are forgiven; forgive others the things you ask for forgiveness for; forgive us, because we forgive others). And do not bring us to the time of trial (do not bring us to that point where we are tested beyond what we can face). That’s it—five statements. Five you can remember on your fingers. Five things we should pray for—the first two really are statements to God, not asking for anything, until we get to our daily bread, asking for forgiveness, and to not be led into trial.

Living into faith is hard, and it can divide us from others around us. Speaking the truth to power, standing against injustice, working in solidarity with the oppressed—these are all things that we know we must do, but when we do them, we find ourselves often on the outside. Even among churches, even within the Christian community, we like to think of injustice as something happening outside of us, not within, and when we begin to live out Christ’s call, we can find division even among us. It is not easy to follow Jesus, but by faith, looking at our cloud of witnesses, we know that we will prevail, because Christ has prevailed.

Call to Worship

God is doing something new;

 **Open your minds to see what God is doing around you.**God is planting new seeds;

 **Open your hearts to feel what God is doing within you.**

God is calling your name;

 **Open yourselves to the call of God to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.**

Come, let us worship God;

 **Come, join together our hearts and minds to follow Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we come before You confessing that sometimes it is too hard. Sometimes we are so tired. We don’t want to hear the cries of the poor because they never stop. We don’t want to see our homeless neighbors because we don’t know how to help them. We don’t want to know how bad things are for others because we are caught up in how bad things are for ourselves. Forgive us when we turn inward. Forgive us when we are selfish and short-sighted. Forgive us when we close ourselves off, forgetting that our Savior called upon us to love our neighbor as ourselves, forgetting that our Savior was among the poor and the lonely and the homeless, forgetting that our Savior called us to deny ourselves to take up our cross to follow him. Forgive us, in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God knows our flaws and our shortcomings, and God says to us, “Hey, I made you. I made you exactly as you are, and I love you. You are precious to me. Come, walk with me. Forgive others, and know you are forgiven, and join your hearts with me in this work.” Go, and do the work God has called you to do, to forgive as you are forgiven, and love as you are loved.

Prayer

God Most High, we come before You knowing that there is a lot of work to do to get this world right. Help us to roll up our sleeves and to clean up the mess we have made, to care for the planet that you have given us. Help us to reach out to those who are in need around us, but especially those in need of love and care. Remind us that it is on us to reach out and ask others how they are doing, what we can pray for, and how we can best help them. For You have given us hearts to love and minds to learn, and help us to use both to serve You. Amen.