Worship Resources for August 16th, 2015—Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14 or Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34:9-14 or Psalm 111; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

Narrative Lectionary: Hebrews 2:10-18

We have been reading through the Rise of the Kings, of Saul and David, and now Solomon. Solomon is different from other kings because he does not seek power or fame (though he already has plenty of it)—he seeks the wisdom of God, to discern between good and evil. God is pleased with Solomon’s request, because it is not selfish, but something that benefits the good of all. God tells Solomon that if he lives according to God’s ways, he will have everything, because through wisdom, discerning good from evil, Solomon will find the way to life.

In Proverbs 9:1-6, Wisdom’s story is told. Wisdom has set her table and sent out the invitation. It is up to us to accept that invitation. Wisdom is personified as a woman in the Hebrew Scriptures, something we often overlook in our reading of the Bible. She has performed the sacrifice already required. She has set the table and invites you to “set aside immaturity and live,” to walk in the ways of wisdom and insight—in other words, to walk with God.

Psalm 34:9-14 is the second in a three-part division of Psalm 34 in the Revised Common Lectionary. In this second part, the psalmist speaks of the fear, or awe, of God, and that if you desire life, walk in the ways of God—depart from evil, seek peace—and pursue it.

Psalm 111 sings praises to God who provides for the people and whose works are good and just. The psalmist also acknowledges the fear, or awe, of God—and that the awe of God is the beginning of wisdom. The word awe is often translated as fear, but fear tends to be an emotion that separates us from God, whereas awe is more about the amazement and wonder we have of God’s work in all of creation.

Ephesians 5:15-20 cautions us to spend our time wisely, to seek God and to sing praises. We make melody to God when we are singing with one another, when we are filled with the Spirit. We are cautioned not to seek pleasure for ourselves, but rather to search for the will of God and pursue it.

John 6:51-58 continues Jesus’ discourse about being the Bread of Life, the Bread from Heaven. Jesus foreshadows to the establishment of the Lord’s Supper as an act of remembrance of the sacrifice Jesus made. Jesus speaks metaphorically of his flesh, but that we must accept Christ’s act of love in order to understand God’s love for us. This is a tricky passage, as the writer of John’s Gospel account makes the Jews sound as if they do not understand or accept it—forgetting that Jesus, along with the other disciples, were also Jewish. We must remember the context of all the people in the text, as well as the writers, writing well after Christians had become a separate movement from Judaism, but that during Jesus’ day, Jesus and the disciples were very much Jewish and still well within Judaism.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the letter to the Hebrews for the last part of the summer (in the Northern Hemisphere) and this week’s selection is from the second chapter. The writer declares that Jesus has become like us, not like angels or other heavenly beings, but rather to become one of us, and we are all kindred in Christ. Jesus has conquered death and freed us from its power. We share in Christ because he came to share with us, to become one of us, to share in our sufferings.

To know God, we must walk in the way of wisdom and insight. We must seek to depart from evil and to do good. The writer of Ephesians says in chapter two that we were created for good works, that God prepared this to be our way of life. We are called to do good, to do the right thing, to live into God’s ways. Too often, though, we fall away. We become selfish and seek our own well-being, or the pleasures of the world over the needs of others. We do not stop and look for God’s ways. We do not fear God; we do not hold God in awe. If we did, we might stop what we are doing and see all of God’s work in our world, and want to be part of it and participate in it. As Christians, we believe God sent us the most perfect way of knowing God, through Jesus the Christ, and he taught us how we ought to live—and yet, we still fail, and seek our own ways.

Call to Worship

Seek wisdom and insight;

 **Follow the teachings of Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Turn away from evil, and do good works;

 **Follow the way of Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Pursue justice, show compassion, and walk humbly with God;

 **Follow Jesus, and live as Christ lived.**

In this time of worship, may we be inspired by the Wisdom of God:

 **May we be challenged to live our lives as Christ lived for us. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy Wisdom, we have failed to live into Your ways. We have turned away from the knowledge of good and evil and pursued worldly gain and satisfaction. We have failed to do justice and instead have justified our ways. Forgive us for our foolishness. Forgive us for not centering our lives on You and Your ways, that have been taught to us for generations—to love God, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the name of Christ, who leads us in Your Wisdom, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Repent! Turn back! God is always there. God is always present with you, even when you have fallen away. Just look—God is right there with you. You are forgiven when you seek forgiveness in Christ. You are restored when you seek restoration in Christ. Know this, live this, and stay the course. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of the stars, the planets, and all the dark space that hides Your mysteries—You are doing new things in secret, things we cannot imagine or see, but we know Your creative work is not complete. You are doing something new in us; deep inside, hidden where we cannot see, the Spirit is working. Move in us. Stir us to work for justice. Inspire us to be creative as You are creating. Hold us to the call of the prophets of old, to walk in Your ways of insight and wisdom, for in following Your ways, we participate in Your creative work. May we be opened to the movement of Your Spirit, to be part of Your great mysterious work in our universe, and in each of us. Amen.