Worship Resources for August 17th, 2014—Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 45:1-15 or Isaiah 56:1, 6-8; Psalm 67 or Psalm 133; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15:10-28

We continue the story of the family of Abraham and Sarah in this first thread in the Hebrew Scriptures. Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his own family, is reunited. He reveals who he is after a period of deception, but bears no ill will towards his brothers. Instead, he gives thanks and praise to God for their reunion and reconciliation and that he is able to help his family in their time of need. Joseph is more concerned about being reunited with his father and brothers than he is about settling the score or being on the right side—instead, Joseph sees that God has done great things despite what had happened to him.

Our second thread follows the prophets, and the prophet Isaiah speaks in this passage of the outsiders, the foreigners who come to know God, that if they follow God’s ways, they are to be included. God has welcomed them, embraced them, and gathers them just as God has gathered Israel from the exile. What God has brought together, we are not to separate.

Psalm 67 is a prayer for God’s blessing, and that the people may respond with grace and humility. May all the people praise God, and may all nations know God, for God is the judge of the earth. God is the one who blesses the earth with creation, and we are to praise God in response for God’s good creation.

Psalm 133 is a blessing of the extended family, the people of Israel, when there is peace—how good it is when kindred dwell together in unity. This is God’s blessing, God’s hope for us—that we dwell together in unity and that we would create peace where we are—in our own home, our family, our community.

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32 shares Paul’s assurance that the promises of God to the people of Israel are not forgotten and are not meaningless. The Hebrew Scriptures are still our Scripture, and the people of Israel are still God’s people—but all people are God’s people. Israel has not been rejected, and the Jewish people are still our brothers and sisters, and all of us—Jew or Gentile—have the capacity to sin. All are sinners, as Paul says in Romans 3:23. But God loves us all despite our capacity for sin. There is no one who is better than another, no group of people who have the right way and others the wrong way—instead, it is because of God’s grace that we all are saved.

Matthew 15:10-28 can be split into two passages or read together. 10-20 contain Jesus’ discourse that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles but what comes out. It is what we do and say to others that is sinful, not what we eat or how we wash our hands. Jesus critiques the customs of some of the religious leaders who declared who was clean and who was not, because their actions of ritual purification benefited themselves but not others, whereas their words and actions were harmful to others. 21-28 is the story of Jesus’ encounter with a Canaanite woman, in which Jesus declares he was “only sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Jesus’ own words and actions are harmful to the Canaanite woman. It isn’t until she calls him out once he has called her a dog by saying, “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master’s table,” that he recognizes what he has done. It is a turning point in the ministry of Jesus. It is the only time in the Gospels in which Jesus appears to change his mind.

What we do and say to others speaks much more about our faith than what we do and say for ourselves. We may be pious in prayer, read Scripture daily, go to church regularly—but if we do not treat our neighbor with love and respect, if we do not welcome the stranger, support the oppressed, feed the hungry, include the marginalized—what good is our faith? It benefits only ourselves. Jesus calls us to the margins. God spoke through the prophets long ago that we are to include those that God has included, which it turns out, is everyone.

Call to Worship (from Romans 10:8,10)

Owe one nothing, except to love one another,

 **For when we love one another, we fulfill God’s commandments.**

Love does no wrong to a neighbor,

 **Love is the fulfilling of the law.**

Come, let us worship the God of Love,

 **Who loves us so much he sent his Only Son, who taught us to love one another. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come to You knowing we have failed to welcome the stranger, to feed the hungry, to support the oppressed. We have kept up appearances of righteousness but failed in our actions to help others. We have said hurtful words, we have gossiped, and we have excluded our brothers and sisters. Forgive us. Call us away from our selfish actions and turn us back to Your way, to seeing our neighbor’s needs as Your needs, to loving our neighbor as You have loved us. In the name of Christ, who became last of all and servant of all so that we might learn to love one another, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

When we have been left out, God has included us. When we have been forgotten, God has remembered us. When we are downtrodden, God lifts us up. You are forgiven, renewed and restored. You are loved by God. Go and share the good news of God’s love by loving others. Amen.

Prayer

Jesus our Savior, lead us in the ways of Your love. Guide us to live lives that are a blessing to those around us instead of a hindrance to their daily needs. Help us to include rather than exclude, to break down walls rather than build up, and to welcome instead of turn away. Help us to live into the ways You taught us, and to learn from our mistakes. In Your name we pray. Amen.