Worship Resources for August 18th—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; Luke 12:49-56; Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Our first thread in the Old Testament readings of our lectionary shares the voices of prophets who spoke out against injustice, even when their own lives were at risk. Isaiah shares the image of the vineyard, an image used throughout the Scriptures, through a poem that begins almost like a love poem in Song of Songs, but with a dark twist. The vineyard has not given the fruit that was expected, but has grown wild, without care for the one who planted it and tended it. This metaphor of the vineyard, as Isaiah shares, is of Israel and Judah, who have not followed God’s ways of justice, but have given in to violence, therefore, God’s protection will be removed from the vineyard. The walls of defense, the hedge to ward off invaders, will be gone, and it will become overgrown with invading species—in other words, God is leaving Israel and Judah to deal with the consequences of their actions, the violence that results from their own violence, the injustice that results from their own unjust acts to the poor.

Jeremiah 23:23-39 is part of our second thread, showing God’s faithfulness through the covenant with Israel. Through Jeremiah, we are reminded that our God is a God who is close to us, not far away. Our God is the creator, the God who is faithful to all of creation. Many of the prophets in Jeremiah’s day have gone astray and just prophesy what the people want to hear, but the true prophet will speak in faithfulness. Though this passage may seem dark words from Jeremiah, we are reminded that God continues to be faithful, God continues to be very near, and God’s word is like fire that purifies, a hammer that breaks through the rock of stubbornness, the rock of oppression.

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19 cries out to the God who created the vineyard to protect the vineyard once again. Relating to the image in Isaiah, we are reminded that God is the one who creates us, and while at times we abandon God’s ways and are left to the consequences of our actions, when we are faithful and turn back to God, God Is with us. Restore us, O God, the psalmist cries, and so we know that God is the God of restoration, not destruction.

Psalm 82 shows that God is the God of justice. This psalm assumes a heavenly court of other gods, in which God cries out for justice against the unjust gods. God removes their power, making them powerless, and instead gives power to the powerless ones, the weak, the widow, the orphan, and the needy. God is the God of the oppressed, the God of the marginalized, and God will not rest until they receive justice.

Luke 12:49-56 is one of the few apocalyptic passages in the Gospels. Jesus speaks to the difficulty of God’s judgment, that people will become divided because of it, even within the family, even within what is supposed to be one. Jesus has come to reconcile all people to God, but that reconciliation will cause some to reject God. There are those who cannot accept a God who accepts and loves all people. They will reject Jesus, and in turn reject the very God who loves them. And those who do reject Jesus do not understand what they are doing, they do not understand the signs of the times for them.

Hebrews 11:29-12:2 recalls the faith of the great heroes of the Bible and the prophets, and how they were rejected and killed for what they believed in, but God still had promises of hope for them, even if it wasn’t fulfilled in their lifetime. These heroes of the faith, these witnesses give us strength and hope, but ultimately it is Jesus who gave himself for us, who let go of himself to die and live for us.

When we ignore the poor, when we turn away from the cries of injustice in this world, we turn away from Jesus himself. In Jesus’ day, the religious hypocrites would claim to follow God’s ways but had no concern for the very ones God declared concern for through the prophets. To this day, we end up being concerned more about right belief and right doctrine than how we live out our faith. When we look to the prophets and to Jesus, we see God hearing the cries of the poor, the widows and the orphans. We see Jesus eating among the sinners and tax collectors and the prostitutes. We hear the rejection of Jesus by others being a rejection of God’s love for all people, but especially the marginalized and outcasts. This same rejection happens today—we fashion Jesus into being concerned about right belief, when Jesus seems clearly to be concerned with how we love one another. We continue to miss the mark, transforming a love for all, especially those on the margins, into a love for a few who are obedient to a set of rules.

Call to Worship

Sing for our God, who sang the world into creation!

**We sing of God’s love, through ancient poems into today’s hymns.**

Shout for our God, who calls out for justice!

**We shout out proclaiming God’s justice, speaking up for the marginalized.**

Lift up your hands for God, who raised up Jesus!

**We lift up our hands, knowing that the world cannot keep us down.**

Pray for God’s Wisdom, guiding creation into fruition

**We enter this time of worship in song, praise and prayer,**

**For God’s steadfast love endures in us forever. Amen!**

Prayer of Confession/Brokenness

God of Justice and Mercy, forgive our short-sightedness in life. We jump to conclusions and offer quick fixes for things that need more attention, especially our relationships with others. Grant us mercy, and the heart to grant others mercy. Forgive us, and grant us the patience to forgive others. Slow us down from the fast-paced world around us that wants us to act quickly, and help us to be more in tune with Your ways. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God’s time is not our time. God’s ways are not our ways. It is not too late to forgive. It is not too late to turn back. It is not too late to change. God is always there, waiting for you. Know this and live a new life. Amen.

Prayer

Creative God, You have instilled in us Your Creative Being. Made in Your image, may we be creative in our own lives, working to make something new. Turn our brokenness into a new hope. Turn our sadness into a new joy. Turn our mourning into dancing. Turn us into a new creation, and may our work instill creativity and new life in others. In the name of Christ, who makes all things new, we pray. Amen.