Worship Resources for August 18th, 2019—Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Creeds, Genesis 1:1-5 and Matthew 6:30-34 or Series on Sabbath, Deuteronomy 5:12-16 and Matthew 11:28-30

The first selection from the Hebrew Scriptures is from the prophet Isaiah, and the story of a vineyard. Isaiah tells it like a love song of a beloved vineyard planter who made a beautiful vineyard, with a protective wall and tower, clearing the stones out of the earth and planting choice vines, but wild grapes grew and overtook the vineyard. God compares Jerusalem and the people of Judah to this vineyard, and because the people have gone wild and turned away from God, God will remove the protective hedge and tower. God will allow it to be trampled and overgrown with briers, and God will make sure it dries up, because God intended it for good, just as God intended the city and the people for good, but they have turned to evil.

The psalmist calls upon God to save the people in Psalm 80, and also invokes the image of the vineyard. The singer tells a story of God bringing a vineyard out of Egypt, bringing the people out of slavery into a new land, where other nations were driven out. God cleared the land and planted the vineyard, but God has broken down its walls. The psalmist calls upon God to have regard for the people, to restore the vineyard, to restore the people, so they might be saved from their enemies.

The second selection from the Hebrew Scriptures turns to the prophet Jeremiah. God speaks to the people, warning against the false prophets, for God is not far off, but near. God calls out those who lie in God’s name, who try to hide, who deceive their own hearts. God calls upon those prophets who are true to speak faithfully, to share their dreams, for God’s word is like fire, like a hammer that can break rock.

In Psalm 82, the psalmist envisions God in heaven, above other gods, demanding justice for the poor and the orphan. God calls out those who are unjust, those who show favoritism to the wicked. God is the one who judges all the nations of the earth, and all, including those in power, will die like anyone else. The psalmist calls upon God to rise up and judge the earth.

The Epistle reading continues in Hebrews, speaking of the faith of the ancestors in 11:29-12:2. Faith is what led the people out of Egypt, what led the people to prevail against Jericho, and for Rahab to betray her own people and help the Israelites. The writer goes on to mention all the ancestral heroes and their acts of faith, but that more was to come, that they did not receive what was promised. They have become the great cloud of witnesses that surround and encourage the faithful to persevere. The writer calls upon the readers to look to Jesus as the pioneer and perfecter of the faith who is now with God.

Jesus speaks of the division he has caused in Luke 12:49-56. Jesus didn’t come to bring a passive unity, but rather a fire that will divide. Jesus sees the coming conflict for the early disciples, the fear that will rise, and that those who choose to follow Jesus will face trials and persecution, even from among their own families and neighbors.

The Narrative Lectionary follows two threads, one on Creeds, and the other on Sabbath, for the next three weeks.

The selection on the Creeds begins with Genesis 1:1-5, the first day of Creation, and the separating out of light from the darkness, and the light being called good, and the making of day and night. Matthew 6:30-34 contains Jesus’ statements on not worrying about daily needs, but instead striving for the reign of God and knowing that those things will come when we care about the needs of all. Jesus concludes that section with not worrying about tomorrow, for today’s troubles are enough for today. Both selections speak to God being the one who has made the day, who has created what is good. One might say God is in control of the day, but a better way is to say, “this is the day that our God has made.”

The selection on Sabbath begins with Deuteronomy 5:12-15. God made the sabbath for all people, and the seventh day is to be a day of rest. The people are to remember that they were once slaves in Egypt, and God has brought them out of that slave labor and into rest. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus speaks through the Wisdom tradition, calling upon those who are carrying heavy burdens to come to him, for in Christ we shall have rest. Learn from the yoke Christ carries, and find rest for your souls.

God’s intention for us is goodness, from the beginning of creation, that we would be God’s people and God will be our God. However, time and again we have gone astray, we’ve run wild. What was created to protect us becomes run over and destroyed by our own doing. We have listened to other voices rather than the voice of God, which calls to us to live into God’s ways of justice and mercy. Though Christ came to show us the way of God, the way became divisive when people were called to change. Perhaps in this time where we find ourselves in great division, we can find comfort in knowing that God’s intention for us since creation is goodness, and that God will see us through. We have a great cloud of witnesses that are with us, and we look to Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, to continue to work through us and in us.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 92:1-4)

It is good to give thanks to God,

 **To sing praises to God’s name, O Most High.**

To declare God’s steadfast love in the morning,

 **And God’s faithfulness by night**

We proclaim God’s love in music and praise,

 **We are made glad by the works of God.**

Come, sing for joy, praise God’s name,

 **For great are the works of our God!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that in our desire for freedom, we have ditched our responsibility. In our pursuit of peace, at times we have sacrificed justice and truth-telling. In our acceptance of Your gifts of the world, we have created a world for ourselves, where resources are exploited and the marginalized continue to suffer. Call us into accountability, O God. Remind us of our responsibility to care for the earth and our neighbors. Hold us to the truth, and the work of justice. Lead us into the difficult work of stewardship, of doing the work of dismantling oppressive systems and our own privilege. In the name of Jesus, who laid down his life for us, may we lay down our power and privilege, and work together for the beloved community here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Jesus calls us to come to him, to hand over our burdens, and that we will be given rest. Be awakened to the sins in the world, the sin we participate in, but know that in Christ the work of forgiveness has already begun. Pursue the work of justice, and reconciliation will follow. Pursue the work of dismantling oppression and privilege, and know that Christ is at work in you. Know that you are a beloved child of God, and that we are all works in progress. Amen.

Prayer

Gardening God, help us to replant the garden. Call upon us to cultivate a nourishing soil, to remove the barriers, and till and soften the hard spots. Sow seeds of love, mercy, justice, and peace, and call upon us to look to You for light and living water. For the places where we have grown unruly and have taken over resources and choked out others, God forgive us. For the ways we have ignored the needs of others and have destroyed the diversity of what You have planted, forgive us. Help us to replant, to regrow, to share what You have given us with all of Your people and creation. Gardening God, help us to tear out what destroys, to prune what is taking up space, and to thrive in what You have created us to be. Amen.