Worship Resources for August 19, 2018—Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Stewardship/Generosity Series, Matthew 6:19-34 (Psalm 51:6-9)

In this season after Pentecost, in the first selection for the Hebrew Scriptures we have followed the rise of the Kings of Israel, from Saul to David, and now to Solomon. Solomon seeks to follow God’s ways, and when God asks Solomon what gift Solomon would like to receive from God, he replies with “an understanding mind.” Solomon knows the task is great—his father united a divided people, and he wants to able to rule wisely, to discern between good and evil. God is pleased with Solomon’s answer, and not only gives him what he asked for, but also give him riches and honor, so that no other king can compete with him.

Psalm 111 is a song of praise to God who has provided for the people. The psalmist sings of God’s ways of justice, faithfulness, and generosity to those who are faithful. God is the redeemer and the one who made and keeps the covenant with the people. The awe (often translated as fear) of God is the beginning of wisdom, and those who are in awe of God have a good understanding for life.

Our second selection in the Hebrew Scriptures focuses on Proverbs 9:1-6, Woman Wisdom. Spinkled throughout the wisdom literature in the Bible, wisdom is personified as a woman. Wisdom has prepared the way for us, and calls to us to leave the ways of the world behind, and to walk in the ways of insight. The way of wisdom nourishes and satisfies us, unlike the ways of the world.

Last week’s reading included the first part of Psalm 34. The reading continues this week with verses 9-14, the second third in an alphabetic acrostic poem in Hebrew. In this section, the psalmist sings of the “fear of the Lord” or the awe of God. For those who seek God, they will lack nothing. Wisdom comes from seeking God and understanding the awesomeness of our God. If one desires life, they will seek God’s ways, leave evil behind, and pursue peace.

The Epistle reading continues in Ephesians with 5:15-20. Continuing with the theme found in our other readings, this portion of the letter focuses on wise living, being filled with the Spirit rather than the ways of this world, seeking God rather than the fleeing pleasures around us. The writer calls upon the listener to give thanks and praise to God, who has given us everything.

The Gospel lesson continues in John’s discourse about the Bread of Life in John 6:51-58. Jesus speaks of himself as the bread and wine of life, to eat his flesh and drink his blood. The religious leaders around him take him literally, but Jesus speaks of abiding spiritually in us, and we in him. This is a difficult passage to understand, but John’s account of Jesus’ life does not mention the Last Supper. By the time this gospel account was written, communion was an established practice of the early church, so these words are reflecting back a theological understanding of the Last Supper that came much later after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

The Narrative Lectionary begins a three-part series on Stewardship, with Matthew 6:19-34. As part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that we are not to store up treasures on earth that are temporary, but instead, treasure in heaven. We are not to worry about what we have, but rather, how we use what God has given us. Jesus speaks of having a healthy view, using the lamp of the body, to see the world full of light rather than darkness. For if we are devoted to wealth, we cannot be devoted to God. Having a healthy view leads us to understanding the resources God has given us, and that all has been given to do God’s work in this world. If we have an unhealthy view, we only see scarcity, and we hoard what we have rather than sharing with others.

Psalm 51:6-9 seeks wisdom and truth, to be made pure and clean, to hear joy and gladness. These three verses are about cleansing from within to be made whole again.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Fear is a harsh word—and the reason it is used is that God is the God of all creation, mighty and powerful, the one who holds our lives in hand. There is fear, but also this awe-inspiring nature of God, who is beyond our understanding. Holding that tension of awe and fear is what grounds us into living God’s ways. Because without the fear of God, we seek our own ways, our own satisfaction, and come up empty. But for Solomon, seeking God’s wisdom showed that he understood who God was and what his place was as an earthly ruler. For the early church, seeking God’s wisdom showed them how to live their lives as a minority religious group under oppression. Seeking God’s wisdom leads us into the way of life, rather than the ways of this world.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 96:1-4)

O sing to the Lord a new song;

**Sing to the Lord, all the earth.**

Sing to the Lord, bless God’s name;

**Tell of God’s salvation from day to day.**

Declare the glory of God among the nations,

**God’s marvelous works among the peoples.**

For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;

**God is above all, and through all, and in all.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wisdom and Insight, we confess our foolishness. We confess that we have sought to conform to the world instead of Your ways. We seek worldly comforts and possessions to satisfy a hunger within us that only You can fulfill. We fumble after worldly measures of success to satisfy desires that fall away when we see the awesomeness of Your work in creation. We confess our foolish ways, and confess our inner longing to follow You. Help us to turn away from the temptation for temporary gains and ease, and to live into Your ways of love, justice, and peace. In the name of Christ, who laid down his life, giving up the ways of the world, so that we might know eternal love and life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

All around you are the wonders of God’s creation. All around you, God has done mighty things for you. All around you, God is doing something new. All around you, God is at work. Behold the awesomeness of our God. Behold God’s love and forgiveness. Embrace it. Let God’s peace be within you. Seek wisdom, walk in the way of insight, and love one another. Amen.

Prayer

Wisdom On High, You have built a home within us. You have prepared a table before us. You have made the invitation, and You call our name. You whisper to us to leave behind the simple ways of the world that lead us into temptation, that cause us to seek worldly measures of success. We were taught that the wages of sin is death, and indeed, the ways of the world lead us to dead ends. Wisdom on High, lead us into life. Breathe in us Your Spirit, and call us to Your ways of love, justice and peace. Amen.