Worship Resources for August 2nd, 2015—Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 11:26-12:13a or Exodus 16:2-4, 9-15; Psalm 51:1-12 or Psalm 78:23-29; Ephesians 4:1-16; John 6:24-35

Narrative Lectionary: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, Song of Solomon 2:10-13, 8:6-7; or Creeds, Deuteronomy 6:1-9, 1 Timothy 3:14-4:11

We have been following the Rise of the Kings in the first passage from the Hebrew Scriptures; this week is part two of the Fall of David. David had Uriah killed to cover up his affair, and marries Bathsheba. The prophet Nathan, however, knows what David has done. He tells a parable to David, and David is angry about the injustice in the story—until Nathan reveals that the parable is about David, and that his sin is known. David confesses—but the damage is done. We know in the greater story God loves David, and God forgives David, but we live with the consequences of our actions. We cannot undo the damage that harms other people.

Our second thread follows the prophets, and Moses and Aaron were the prophets of Israel. Just after celebrating the crossing of the Red Sea and the defeat of Pharaoh’s army, the people begin to complain about how things were better back in Egypt, back when they were oppressed—because at least they knew where their food was coming from. So God provides manna from heaven—and quails—so they have their protein and grains. Food to fuel them for the journey. The people remembered the bread in Egypt that they could eat as much as they wanted—but they were enslaved. Now, they must turn to God to fulfill their daily needs, and know that God will provide for them.

Psalm 51:1-12 is a confession, a plea for forgiveness, an acknowledgement of sin. Traditionally attributed to David, this confessional psalm asks to be restored to God, knowing that while what has been done on earth cannot be undone, forgiveness and restoration can be found in God.

Psalm 78:23-29 sings the memory of God providing manna for the people in the wilderness. In this sung memory, God has provided everything they could need, the “bread of angels.” There is enough food for them to be filled, and God has given the people “what they craved.” In Exodus, the people complained about the manna later on, but in this sung memory, the psalmist remembers what God has done for the people, in fulfilling their needs.

Ephesians 4:1-16 speaks of the unity found in Christ—that all who follow Jesus should be, and are, one body. The image of the body that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 12 is also found here, that each part is needed but also “working properly”—that is, doing what they are supposed to be doing, which is working for the good of all. One Lord, one faith, one baptism—an early Church confession that there is one God, and we are one people in Christ.

John 6:24-35 continues the discourse on the Bread of Life. Jesus has fed the hungry crowds with only five loaves and two fish, but Jesus now speaks to the crowds that he is the Bread of Life. That what we desire in this world, what we are seeking, where we long to be satisfied—all can be found in Christ. In Christ, we are made whole. In Christ, we are fulfilled. Just as the Samaritan woman asked Jesus to have the water of eternal life so she would never be thirsty again, the crowds say, “Sir, give us this bread always.”

The Narrative Lectionary has two choices: Old Testament Wisdom and Poetry, and Creeds. This is the final Sunday of those two choices before moving on to five weeks on Hebrews. The Wisdom and Poetry choice this Sunday are selections from the Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs). These very brief passages from this erotic poem found in our Bible (yes, it is erotic. No, it is not about God’s relationship with Israel, as has been often told in Sunday schools) celebrate human erotic love, a gift from God that should be honored. Erotic love was not meant to be shameful, but celebrated as an intimate way of expressing love between two people.

The selection for Creeds comes from Deuteronomy and 1 Timothy. The selection from Deuteronomy contains the Shema, the declaration that God is One, and the commandment to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our might. By this we are to rule our lives and teach our children. The passage from 1 Timothy 3:14-4:11 contains an ancient church statement of faith about Christ being revealed to all, on earth and in heaven, and to live in godly ways. The writer warns about the hypocrites who still follow traditional rules, and those who are forbidding marriage (possibly some Gnostic believers). Instead, the writer instructs to live in ways that are worthy of God, not what human beings teach according to custom and tradition.

How do we live our lives? All too often Christians think that “being saved” is punching the ticket on the train to heaven and that’s all that is needed, but also at times Christians feel like the world is to just be used for pleasure. Instead, the entire Bible is about how we live our lives on earth, how we love God and care for one another, and that we rely on God to fulfill our needs, not worldly cravings. On earth, we are called to lives of justice and mercy, forgiveness and restoration. We are called not to simply live now and hope for more later—but to live as if the kingdom of heaven has been drawn near, and the work we are called to do is of utmost importance now.

Call to Worship (from Ephesians 4:1-6)

God is calling us into a life worthy of God’s love,

 **With all humility and gentleness, may we bear with one another in love.**

May we worship in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace;

 **There is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism;**

One God of us all, who is above all, and through all, and in all;

 **Come, let us worship our God, joined together in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Oneness, God of Unity, God of the Body—we have divided, we have taken sides, we have built walls and dug trenches. We have failed to see the other as part of Your body. We have failed to consider the other as our kindred in You. We have failed Your commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Forgive us. Help us to build bridges, tear down walls, and join together. Help us to be one again, Your people, Your body here on earth. In the name of Christ, who makes us one, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God has created us all in the image of the Divine, a wonderfully diverse spectrum of life, and yet, through that diversity there is one God that joins us together. We are fearfully, and wonderfully, made. God desires restoration and healing for you. Know God’s love. Share God’s love with others, and may we pray that in our diversity, we would find our image of God reflected in one another. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of Life, call us into the work of the Church, the work of the body, to restore the One-ness you created us to be. Help us to recognize and honor our differences, to appreciate and celebrate what makes us unique. Bind us together, reminding us that we need one another, that all of the parts are needed to work together to be the body of Christ. Breathe in us Your Spirit, so that we may do Your work here on earth. In the name of the Body, in the name of Christ Jesus, we pray. Amen.