Worship Resources for August 2nd, 2020—Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 32:22-31 and Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Isaiah 55:1-5 and Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

Narrative Lectionary: Series on 2 Corinthians, 5:1-21 Walk by Faith not Sight

Jacob had a second encounter with God in Genesis 32:22-31. Fleeing from his brother Esau’s wrath, on his way to Laban’s home (where he would meet and marry his wives and have children), he had a dream of a ladder to heaven with angels ascending and descending. Now, as he leaves Laban’s home, away from Laban’s pursuit and back toward encountering Esau, he wrestles with the angel of the Lord. Though the angel knocks his hip out of joint, he manages to overpower the angel and refuses to let the angel go until the angel blesses him. The angel gives him a new name: Israel, one who wrestles with God, for Jacob has wrestled with humans and God and has prevailed. Jacob marvels that he has survived such an encounter with God, seeing God face to face. This name will become the name of the people. When Jacob left his home, all he had was a vision and a promise. Now, as he returns to the land promised to him, he has wives, children, livestock—all the fulfillments of promises made to his own grandparents before him, that his descendants would become a great nation.

The innocent one stands before God in Psalm 17:1-7, 15. The psalmist seeks God’s justice and deliverance before their enemies. They believe they are in the right, and they have held steadfast to God’s ways. They trust in God’s love, knowing God will answer their prayer. They know in the end they shall behold the face of God, and justice shall be done.

The prophet Isaiah declares that God’s light will shine through the people in Isaiah 55:1-5. Everyone who comes to God will be satisfied and will hunger and thirst no more. Work for the spiritual food of God, and not for the food of the world that does not satisfy. Because of the covenant of God with David, the people are a witness to all nations. All peoples will turn to God because God has glorified the people of Israel.

This portion of Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21 contains a refrain of what God has done and will do for the people. God is good, just, gracious, and merciful. God is the one who fulfills our needs and desires. God is close to the faithful, watching over them, and saves them from their enemies. The psalmist concludes this portion by calling all flesh—all of creation—to bless God forever.

In our Epistle selection, we begin the second half of Paul’s letter to the church in Rome. In 9:1-5, Paul turns his letter toward how God revealed the Messiah through the Hebrews, along with the covenants, the law, and the promises given through the patriarchs of long ago. Much of Romans is Paul’s theological treatise of how Christ came for all—Jewish and Gentile—and that being children of God does not come by physical ancestry.

Jesus was moved to compassion for the crowds in Matthew 14:13-21. The disciples told Jesus to send the crowds into the villages to buy food, but Jesus put the responsibility back on the disciples. The disciples were overwhelmed, for all they had were five loaves and two fish. Jesus told the disciples to bring the fish and bread to him. He lifted them up to heaven, blessed and broke the bread and fish, and gave it to the disciples to distribute. All ate and were filled, and there were twelve baskets full of leftovers. Jesus and the disciples fed five thousand men, plus women and children. The miraculous feeding of the crowd happened because Jesus was filled with compassion (the Greek word used here means “moved from the gut”), and others were filled with a similar compassion that moved them into action, possibly sharing the food they had brought for themselves.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series in 2 Corinthians with “Walk by Faith not Sight.” In 2 Corinthians 5:1-21, Paul begins by speaking of our spiritual bodies, of stripping away everything that is worldly and being built up with the Spirit, that everything dying can be swallowed up by life. While we are living in the body, we are away from our home with God. This dwelling is temporary; dwelling with God is eternal. We live into confidence, knowing that we belong to God and to God’s reign; not this world that we have created. Paul encourages the church in Corinth not to take pride in outward appearances, but what is in the heart, the transformation that is there. Not at what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen. We live not for ourselves, but for Christ who raised us, and we can no longer look at the world and each other through our human point of view. We are the witnesses of Christ in this world, calling upon each other to turn to God.

The ways of this world call us to look to our own desires first, our own comforts, preserving our way of life. But God has called us into a way of compassion, where we are moved from within to the needs of this world. We are moved by compassion in our gut that says it isn’t right that some go hungry, that their needs aren’t met. We are moved by compassion to give up the measures of this world—that we have more people in the pews and more money in the offering plate—and instead, turn to the inward transformation. Especially in this Covid world, how is God transforming our measures? How God transforming our goals? How is God transforming our hearts, so that even our outward selves are transformed to be witnesses of Christ in this world?

Call to Worship (Psalm 145:8-10, 13)

**The Lord is merciful and compassionate,  
    very patient, and full of faithful love.**

**The Lord is good to everyone and everything;  
    God’s compassion extends to all God’s handiwork!  
All that you have made gives thanks to you, Lord;  
    all your faithful ones bless you!**

**Come, let us worship our God,**

**Whose faithfulness endures forever.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Everlasting Change, we confess that we are stubborn. We don’t like change. We want things to stay as they once were. Like the people of the Exodus, O God, sometimes we remember only the good things of the past and forget the horrors that You have helped us to leave behind. Like the people of the Exile, O God, sometimes we have grown comfortable with the status quo instead of remembering that You have called us into liberation. Transform our hearts, O God. Open us to listen for Your Wisdom. Help us to know Your transformative love. Guide us to move into Your ways of compassion, justice, healing, and hope. In the name of Christ, who calls us all into resurrection, into new life now and forever, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are a child of God. You are made in the image of God, carefully created to bring God’s light and love into this world. Even when you go astray of God’s intention, God is here to help you find your way back. God’s love is steadfast forever, and there is nothing you can do to change that. So accept that you are beloved of God, and forgiveness, grace, and peace, are yours, now and always. Amen.

Prayer

God of Purpose, You created the earth out of the formless. You created the world out of chaos. You made order out of disorder. You set boundaries to the earth, the sky, the seas. You made everything with intention. Even when we cannot feel it, O God, You have formed us out of love. Even when we cannot perceive it, O God, You have given us wisdom to seek Your ways. Even when we fail to recognize it, O God, You have shown us Your ways of justice and mercy and peace. Help us to seek You, the Great Creator, who made the entire universe with purpose, and made each of us with the intention of love. Amen.