Worship Resources for August 20, 2017—Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 45:1-15 and Psalm 133; Isaiah 56:1, 6-8 and Psalm 67; Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32; Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Sacraments, Baptism: Psalm 84, Romans 6:1-11, or Series on Revelation, 5:1-13 (John 1:29-31)

We conclude the first half of the season after Pentecost this Sunday. In the first selection for the Hebrew Scriptures, we conclude the readings for Genesis. As we have focused on the beginnings of the Hebrews, we end our time with the immediate family of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar; Ishmael, Isaac, and Rebekkah; Esau, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, their maidens and all of their children.

We read of Joseph’s revelation to his brothers: that the brother they believed they had lost was found. The brother they had tried to kill was alive. The brother they had sold into slavery was now the right hand of Pharaoh, and would save all the people from famine. Joseph is the agent of God’s actions, not his brother’s actions, for as Joseph understands it, God sent him with a purpose. The writer (or later editor) of the story echoes what will happen to the people when they go into exile hundreds of years later: God will preserve a remnant, because of what Joseph has gone through for his brothers. Despite all the bad things that have happened, learnings can happen. Meaning can be made and understood out of the senseless. God will see the people through, just as God saw Joseph through.

Psalm 133 is a celebration of family and clan, of tribe and people coming together and dwelling in unity. This psalm might have been sung at a wedding or other gathering of individual families coming together to celebrate. Family and tribe at peace is like an anointing by God, like the oil that runs down.

The prophet Isaiah declares that there are others who will be gathered besides the outcasts of Israel. There will be foreigners and others whom God includes into the fold. The prophet declares to the people to maintain justice and do what is right. Outsiders will be included, if they hold fast to God’s name and do what is right.

Psalm 67 is petition for God’s blessing, so that all people may come to know God through God’s acts of mercy. The psalmist asks for the people to praise God, for all the peoples and nations to sing for joy, for God is the one who judges all. God’s blessings are known through the abundance of the earth’s bounty, which is for all people.

Paul declares in Romans 11 that God has not rejected Israel. The gifts of God cannot be revoked. Because all are disobedient to God, no matter who they are, they are also all redeemed by God, and receive God’s mercy and blessing.

Jesus speaks to the crowds in Matthew 15:10-28. In the first ten verses, Jesus teaches that it isn’t what goes in, but what comes out that defiles. It isn’t about what we eat or wear, but about how we act, what we say and do that shows how faithful we are. We are judged by what is in our heart: love for our neighbors, or concern about being right/wrong. Jesus was speaking specifically against those who were caught up in rule-following rather than seeing the people around them. However, in verses 21-28, Jesus appears to ignore his own advice after a Canaanite woman begs him to heal her daughter when he is traveling with the disciples (the story is also found in Mark 7:24-30 as the Syrophoenician woman; in that story, Jesus is by himself with the woman in house). Jesus declares it is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs. Jesus is calling the woman a dog. She is nothing. And yet she boldly proclaims that even the dogs eat the food from the master’s table. She may be a dog in the people’s eyes, but she is still worthy. For saying that, her faith has made her daughter well. It isn’t about her background or who she is, but about her faith, and her boldness, and her affirmation that her daughter’s life is worthy and meaningful.

The Narrative Lectionary continues with two selections for the last month of the summer: Sacraments and Revelation. Psalm 84 declares how wonderful the home of God is, and how the psalmist longs to dwell there. Even one day would be better than a thousand elsewhere. Happy are those who find their home with God.

When we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into Christ’s death, as Paul declares in Romans 6:1-11. And so, we are also raised with Christ. Our old self is crucified with Christ, put to death, so that sin and death no longer have a hold on us. Jesus died to sin once for all, and now he lives for God, as do we.

In John’s Revelation, during his heavenly vision in 5:1-13 there is a scroll with seven seals. Only the Lamb is worthy to open the seals, the Lamb that was slaughtered. The Lamb has received power and wealth and wisdom and might, honor and glory and blessing, and every creature sings blessings to the Lamb, even the creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

John the Baptist declares in John 1:29-31, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” He declares this as Jesus is coming, and some of John’s disciples turn and follow Jesus. John proclaimed who Jesus was to the world, that he might be revealed to all.

God works in mysterious ways, as the saying goes, but throughout scripture we find that sometimes it is only after going through a difficult time, like Joseph, or doing the difficult thing, like the Canaanite woman speaking boldly to Jesus, that we see God at work in us. God does not cause bad things to happen. God does not desire suffering. But God is with us during the bad, in the midst of suffering, and when we trust in God, we can find that God’s goodness is still in the world, still at work, and in us and in our lives.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 43:18-19)

Forget the former things,

 **Do not dwell on the past**

See, God is about to do a new thing!

 **Can you not see it?**

God is making a way in the desert,

 **God is making a river in the wilderness**

See, God is making all things new;

 **Come, worship Christ, who leads us to new life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that at times it is hard for us to find Your goodness in the world. All we see is the hardship. All we feel is despair. All we know is hopelessness. We confess that without You, we cannot see the goodness of Your creation. Without You, we do not see the value and worth of other human beings. Without You, we despise and reject what is different, what seems useless, what doesn’t help us in our immediate need. With You, we know hope. With You, we know courage. With You, we know that we are not alone. With You, we know that Your goodness and mercy will be with us all the days of our lives, leading us into eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. May we choose You, each and every day, each and every moment. May we choose to see Your goodness, each and every day, each and every moment. May we choose Your love, always. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s faithfulness endures forever through the love of Jesus Christ. Even in the harshest of times, the goodness of God’s love flows in our beating hearts and in the turning of the tides, in the sunlight breaking through the clouds. Trust in God. Trust in God’s goodness and mercy and faithfulness. Most of all, trust in God’s love, which never ends. Know that you are loved, and love one another. Amen.

Prayer

Composer of the Universe, You have taught us Your song. Help us to sing out with glad hearts. Help us to find the rhythm, to listen for the melody. Remind us that different voices can blend in harmony as we encounter others who are different than us. Help us, always, to know that You have put the song in our mouths, in our hearts, and You are the one who calls it forth. You are the one who composes, who conducts, and who leads us in the song of life. Amen.