Worship Resources for August 23, 2015—Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Kings 8:1, 6, 10-11, 22-30, 41-43 or Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18; Psalm 34:15-22 or Psalm 84; Ephesians 6:10-20; John 6:56-69

Narrative Lectionary: Hebrews 4:14-5:10

In our first thread of the Hebrew Scriptures, we have been reading the Rise of the Kings for the last three months—of Saul, David and Solomon. We are nearing the end of these stories, and today we hear the prayer of Solomon to consecrate the temple, where God will dwell with the people on earth and all people will know that God is in Israel. The temple and the throne are in the same city, though separate—the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Heaven meet. This is important to note that in later times, when the people were looking for a Messiah, they thought both kingdoms would be established again in Jerusalem—the earthly kingdom of Israel, and the kingdom of heaven. Solomon makes it clear this is where God reigns, and that all people of earth, Israel and foreigners, will be drawn to God here.

Our second thread has followed the prophets, and Joshua is in the line of Moses, a prophet-leader in the time before the kings. The people are finally entering the land that has been promised to them through their ancestors, and Joshua reminds the people that long ago their ancestors left other gods to follow and worship the Lord. He gives the people a choice to either go back to those gods, or to remember the God that has delivered them out of slavery, and continues to lead them and fulfill promises made of old.

We complete the third reading of Psalm 34 this week, and the last third of the psalm sings that God remembers and hears the calls of the righteous. Those who follow the ways of God and live their lives according to the commandments will find deliverance and safety in God. Those who serve God in their daily lives will know God’s faithfulness.

Psalm 84 sings praise to God and thanksgiving for the temple, where God dwells with the people. The psalm is a blessing for those who have come to worship God there. There is peace, security and safety for those who come to dwell in the house of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:10-20 concludes the selections from Ephesians for the past few weeks. Instead of a soldier wearing armor ready for battle, the “armor of God” serves as protection against the ways of this world—spiritual armor for a spiritual battle. The ways of the world will tempt us towards greed, unfaithfulness, hopelessness, and violence. The breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, the helmet of salvation, the shoes of peace—these all are metaphors for being rooted in faith, our defense against evil in the world.

John 6:56-69 is the end of the discourse on the “Bread of Heaven.” The bread of the world will not satisfy us. If we look to the ways of the world, we will perish, but if we find nourishment in the bread from heaven, we find eternal life. Jesus declares in this passage the ways of the world useless, and we must turn to the ways of God in order to have true life. Even Jesus’ disciples didn’t get it, and were offended by his words, but they know that in Jesus they have found something far greater than what they could find in the world: eternal life.

The Narrative Lectionary is on week three of a five-week study of Hebrews. This passage declares Jesus as the high priest, a priest without sin who is truly able to intercede on our behalf. The writer refers to an obscure passage in the Old Testament—the priest Melchizedek, who met Abraham, and then is mentioned in the psalms only once—a priest from before the time of priests in Israel. As we read through Hebrews, we understand that Jesus is both the High Priest and the ultimate sacrifice, therefore dismantling the system of sacrificial atonement.

The ways of the world call us to look to ourselves, to put ourselves before others, to survive. The ways of the world tempt us to seek worldly success, to have more than others. The way of God calls us to live according to God’s commandments, summed up by Jesus: to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. What do we serve—the ways of the world, or the ways of God? Whom do we serve—wealth and success, or Jesus, who came to serve others? What do we eat—the bread of the world, that satisfies us now but will continue to make us hunger for more, or the bread of heaven, in which we will never be hungry again?

Call to Worship

Come, join us as we worship God together

**For we are the body of Christ, and we need each other.**

Come, fill your hearts with praise

**For God has made us all different, and all of us are necessary.**

Come, fill your souls with peace

**For the Spirit is moving among us now.**

Come, join us as we worship God together

**For we are the body of Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God, You are One, and You created us to be one in our diversity. But we have divided and separated. We have oppressed and marginalized. We have conquered and annihilated. Sometimes we have even used Your name as an excuse for our evil. Forgive us. Call us into repentance from racism, sexism, homophobia, and all forms of oppression. In the name of Christ, who prays that we would be one, so we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God called us into being and calls us into repentance. God loved us into being, and loves us back to right paths. God restores us. May we seek forgiveness and restoration with one another. May we follow Christ, who gave his life for us, so that we might know forgiveness, love, and life eternal. Amen.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, direct our paths. Guide our lives to be holy before You, to seek the welfare of others, to serve those in need, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Holy Spirit, come before us, and show us the way when the ways of the world press in. Holy Spirit, lead us through when the powers and principalities of this world seem far too great and the struggles of poverty and oppression are far too overwhelming. Holy Spirit, direct our paths, so that we might live our lives in righteousness, right-living before You, that seeks the marginalized and oppressed, the lost and the lonely, the forgotten and the ashamed, for these are Your children. Holy Spirit, guide us, lead us, direct us, all in the way of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.