Worship Resources for August 24th, 2014—Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 1:8-2:10 or Isaiah 51:1-6; Psalm 124 and Psalm 138; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

In our first thread of the Hebrew Scriptures, we have left behind the original family of Abraham and Sarah through Joseph and his brothers, and we fast forward several generations in Egypt, to a time when the early relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh has been forgotten, and the people of Israel have been forced into slavery. To keep the population of Hebrews from growing, Pharaoh has ordered all baby boys to be thrown into the river. But the midwives manage to keep the children alive, and through the midwives and a mother and a daughter, a baby boy survives and is drawn out of the water by Pharaoh’s own daughter, who calls him Moses, which means drawn from the water. Midwives help babies out of the waters of birth; Pharaoh’s own daughter becomes a midwife when she draws Moses from the water.

Our second thread follows the prophets, and we hear the words of the prophet Isaiah that just as God has hewn us from the rock of creation, we follow in the footsteps of the ancestors we come from—God will lead us to a new home. Abraham and Sarah were brought to a new home promised by God, and so too will the people of Israel return home, as it has been promised to them. And while everything earthly will pass away, God’s promises endure forever.

Psalm 124 sings praises for God, who has delivered the people from both natural disasters and worldly enemies. The psalmist sings to remind the congregation that their help is in the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth. The Creator has rescued them, and if it had not been for the Lord, they would not have survived. All their hope and trust is in God.

Psalm 138 gives thanks to the God of gods, for whom all kings shall praise and come to know the ways of the Lord. God sees the poor, the powerless, the humble; but God also sees the powerful and proud and perceives their hearts. God’s love endures forever and delivers the faithful.

Romans 12:1-8 echoes 1 Corinthians 12. Paul uses this image of the church as Christ’s body, that we are one with many members, that our bodies are a living sacrifice, that we are the holy temple of God. We have a variety and diversity of gifts, but the same Spirit. Everyone has different gifts for different purposes, but we are all needed as the body of Christ.

Matthew 16:13-20 contains Peter’s declaration of who Jesus is: The Messiah, the Son of the living God. Jesus declares that Peter is the Rock on which the church will be built, that whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven, whatever they loose on earth will be loosed in heaven—and then Jesus tells them sternly not to tell anyone that he is the Messiah. Because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to Peter, but God. Peter and the other disciples see Jesus for who he is because they see God in him. Jesus knows that others will not believe unless they also can see God in him.

Today we Christians proclaim Jesus is Lord. We know this because we have been taught it through the experience of our ancestors passed down to us. And while we individually may have experiences that lead us to knowing Christ, Jesus desired for the people to experience in as the son of the Living God, to see God in him through the way he lived. Peter has had this revelation that has come from God, and Jesus orders them not to tell anyone he is the Messiah so that others may experience it as well. Where do we experience God? Instead of telling everyone they need to believe in Jesus in order to be saved, what if we asked the question, “Where have you seen God in the world?” What if we framed our faith based on experiences rather than telling people what to believe?

Call to Worship

The God of our ancestors calls to us today;

**May we have the faith of our ancestors to go where God leads us.**

The God of our children calls to us today;

**May we work for justice and peace to build up the reign of God on earth.**

Jesus, the son of the Living God, calls to us now;

**May we worship God, follow Jesus, and be moved by the Spirit**

**To do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with God, now and forever. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we have failed to do justice. We have failed to show mercy to others but expect it for ourselves. We have forgotten to be kind. Wake us up to see the violence, the injustice and oppression in our world. Call us away from the worldly ways of looking after ourselves and our loved ones, and to Your ways of seeing all of Your people as our kin, all of creation as our home. Forgive us, help us to repent, to turn to You and to live into your ways of justice, peace and mercy. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God knows our hearts, and God knows when we desire to change how we view the world and how we live. God will help us onto right paths. God forgives us, and restores us, to do God’s work in this world. Know that you are a beloved child of God, and that there is always the time to do something new. Share the Good News.

Prayer

Son of the living God, help us to remember that You are alive in us. Whenever we serve another, we serve You. Whenever we seek justice for the oppressed, we are seeking justice for You. Whenever we live into the ways of peace, we are living in Your ways. Renew and restore us when we feel downtrodden, when we are struggling, when the challenges of the world seem insurmountable. Remind us that You have walked this path and walk it with us now. In Your name we pray. Amen.