Worship Resources for August 25th—Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 1:4-10 or Isaiah 58:9b-14; Psalm 71:1-6 or Psalm 103:1-8; Luke 13:10-17; Hebrews 12:18-29

In our first Hebrew Scriptures thread in this season after Pentecost, we read of prophets who spoke out for God’s justice, when it was not popular, even when their own lives were at risk. Jeremiah was called as a young boy, too young for others to listen, too young for his own confidence; but God tells him “Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’” (vs. 7). God tells Jeremiah not to be afraid, for it is God who is sending him forth, God who is giving him the words to speak. It is all too easy to allow society’s view of one’s limitations to overcome courage, but God give us courage and strength to go where God has called us, if we have the faith to go where God sends us.

Isaiah 58:9b-14 is from our second thread, showing how God’s promises are fulfilled through God’s covenant even when the people fail. Isaiah here tells of how light shines through the acts of justice we live out: being kind to others, not placing blame; feeding the hungry and caring for the ill and wounded. Light shines through us, and we become witnesses of what God is blessing, when we bless others. When we bring healing, we are known as “repairers of the breach” (vs. 12). God will bring restoration to the people who have faced utter destruction, when they bring restoration to others.

Psalm 71:1-6 seeks God’s protection and promise of deliverance, reminding God that God is the one who brings forth life, from our mother’s womb. We put our trust in God when evil surrounds us and enters our life—we know that God is the one who brings salvation.

Psalm 103:1-8 sings of God’s justice and blessings for those who seek God’s justice. God is the one who brings goodness, and God is the one who works all things towards justice for the oppressed. The psalmist sings of God’s blessings of love and mercy, the one who redeems life.

Luke 13:10-17 contains the account of one of the healings on the Sabbath that Jesus conducts. Jesus is teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath and heals a woman who is bent over, setting her “free” from her “ailment” (vs. 12). But the leader of the synagogue can only focus on the action of Jesus that happened on the Sabbath, not the result of that action that was in healing and freedom for this woman. Throughout history, we people of faith have had difficulty with rules. We have taken them to the extreme so that the rule means nothing anymore. If one takes the rule of Sabbath to the extreme, as in this case, Sabbath—a time set aside to rest to focus on God—isn’t about God anymore. When we take rules to the extreme, they are no longer about God but about control and power. Rules such as not having women speak in church, which was probably a specific cultural context for the early Christians in certain communities—rules like these are not about following God’s ways but rather about controlling who gets to preach and lead in a church. We’ve lost the meaning behind them completely. We become so concerned about rules we fail to actually do the right thing.

Hebrews 12:18-29 contains a powerful metaphor, a blazing fire that cannot be touched. Recalling the burning bush in which God spoke to Moses, and the pillar of smoke that traveled with the Israelites out of the slavery of Egypt, we remember that the presence of God is near us and yet untouchable; beautiful and terrifying. Jesus has given himself for us, for a new covenant with God, bringing us closer to God and yet this action can never and will never be repeated. Jesus was a sacrifice we desired by taking him to the cross, and yet death was conquered through this act. The act of sacrifice is removed from worship forever. Jesus’ sacrifice ends all sacrifice.

We are all too often concerned about rules—either rules such as the Ten Commandments, which throughout tradition we have assumed were passed down from God—or unspoken rules in society, such as who is in and who is out, who gets to speak and who must be silenced. We become so consumed by rules that we forget the original reason for them. The Sabbath was a gift from God to the people, but some leaders had forgotten and made the Sabbath into following rules. Jeremiah didn’t think he could speak because he was only a boy, and only elders (being men) could speak in public, but God called him to do so anyway. God shows us time and again there is another way—when we love one another, show compassion, have mercy, and do justice for others—we are following God’s ways much more than following a list of rules. The writer of Hebrews shows us that Jesus fulfilled a rule—the rule of sacrifice—in order to break it forever. And so must we follow the rule—the law—of love, in order to break the chains that keep us from loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Call to Worship

God of Justice, Peace and Mercy

 **We come to praise Your name!**

God of Love, Forgiveness and Grace

 **We come to praise Your name!**

God of Wholeness, Healing, and Restoration

 **We come to praise Your name!**

Come into this time of praise and worship

 **We come to sing, pray, and worship our Wondrous God!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God, there is no God but You—yet we follow the gods of this world, the idols that tell us that saying certain words or following certain rules will get us into heaven, and will give us life after death. Turn us away from such foolishness and help us instead to focus on eternity, in how we love one another and pass on Your ways of love and justice to others around us. Help us to be less concerned with saving our lives and instead willing to risk the safety and security of worldly success to live out Your justice in this world, to help others instead of ourselves. In the name of Christ, who gave his all for us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Philippians 2:7-9)

Christ, who being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. God gave him the name that is above every name. This Jesus the Christ is the giver of life, so that we might have new life in him. You are forgiven. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Way, help us to seek wisdom and insight as we travel the way of faith. Steer us away from the shortcuts that turn into dead-ends. Guide us safely from the rises and falls of worldly folly and lead us to the still waters and green pastures. Bring down the mountains that block us and raise up the valleys that seem so steep. Make the rough places easier for us to navigate, and help us to know we are not alone on the journey. Call us to seek out each other’s help and support as we travel the way of faith. In the name of Jesus, our fellow sojourner, we pray. Amen.