Worship Resources for August 25th, 2019—Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Creeds, John 1:1-18 and 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, or Series on Sabbath, Genesis 2:1-3 and John 15:9-15

The first selection in the Hebrew scriptures follows the rise of the prophets, and today’s selection is the call of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was just a young boy with the voice of God came to him, but God told him not to be afraid. God told Jeremiah that he would go where God sent him and speak as God called him to. God touched the boy’s mouth, and told him that God’s words were now in him. God appointed Jeremiah over nations and kingdoms, to pull down and overthrow, but also to build and to plant something new.

Psalm 71:1-6 is a song of deliverance to God. The psalmist calls upon God to be their rock and refuge, their fortress from the wicked. The psalmist sings that it was God who called them forth from their mother’s womb and whom they have leaned upon since birth, and they will continually praise God.

The prophet Isaiah speaks to the people coming out of exile in the second selection from the Hebrew scriptures. Isaiah sees that the people are continuing their corrupt ways, even after the exile, but God speaks through the prophet that if the people put away their evil ways—if they offer food to the hungry, stop pointing fingers at each other and help those in need—God will be with them. God will restore the people, and they will be called repairers of the breach. If they honor the sabbath for God and not for their own desires, they will find rest and delight with God.

Psalm 103:1-8 is a song of praise to God who forgives, heals, is slow to anger, and abounds in steadfast love. The psalmist begins with words of blessing for all God has done for them. The psalmist sings of God’s steadfast love and mercy like a crown that sits upon them. God works for vindication and justice for all who are oppressed, and God has made their ways known to the people.

The Epistle reading continues with Hebrews, in 12:18-29. The writer looks at the covenant of God through Moses, and the covenant of God through Jesus Christ. The people could not approach the mountain because of the fire on the mountain, and Moses trembled in fear—but Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. God is a consuming fire, and has purified all through Christ, so all may approach God through Jesus.

Luke 13:10-17 contains the story of when Jesus found a woman who was unable to stand up straight. She was in the same synagogue on the sabbath that Jesus was teaching at, and he called to her and told her she was set free. He laid his hands on her, and she was able to stand up, and praised God. But the leader of that synagogue was upset because it was the sabbath, and told the crowds to come any other day but the Sabbath for curing. Jesus cried out against the hypocrites, for they would water their animals if they were thirsty on the sabbath but not help one of their own people. Jesus’ opponents were put to shame, and the crowds rejoiced.

The Narrative Lectionary has two series through September 1st: one on Creeds, and the other on Sabbath.

The beginning of the gospel according to John begins with the poetic prologue that the Word was in the beginning with God, and the Word is the Light of the World. John came to testify to the light, though he himself was not the light. The light was in the world, and the world came into being through him, but the world did not know him. The Word became Flesh and lived among us. No one has seen God, but we have been made known of God through the Son. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 speaks of the message of the cross as foolishness to the world, for the world did not know God through wisdom. Instead, the world came to know God through Christ crucified, for God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. In both passages, Christ is the one who has revealed the hiddenness of God’s wisdom to the world.

The second series for the Narrative Lectionary on Sabbath begins with Genesis 2:1-3, and the account of the last day of creation, the seventh day, which God rested. God blessed the day and hallowed it. This account in Genesis from the priestly tradition reminds us that the purpose of this story of creation is to teach us about the sabbath and why it is holy. In John 15:9-15, Jesus reminds the disciples to keep his commandments, and to abide in Christ’s love. These commandments are given so that Christ’s joy may be complete. The commandment Jesus gives is to love one another, for no one has greater love than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

Prophetic work is not easy—it calls us to move against the status quo, to do what is not expected of us, to side with the marginalized and oppressed. The observance of Sabbath is prophetic work—to be against the productive consumer culture around us. Instead, Sabbath breaks away from the mechanism of the world. Sabbath is about following God’s commandments, resting in the assurance of God as our Creator. It is not simply about “not working” but about breaking the cycle of consumption and productivity that threatens to break us down and tear apart our relationships. Sabbath is about wholeness, a reminder that we are part of each other and the earth around us. Sabbath is rest from the world we have created, and a reminder that we are part of the earth and universe that God has made—for us.

Call to Worship

This time is a gift to you; use it well.

**May we worship our God with gladness and thanksgiving.**

This earth is a gift to you; care for it well.

**May we savor the gifts of God by being good stewards of all God’s resources.**

These people are a gift to you; love them well.

**May we love one another as God has loved us, all children of the Creator.**

Jesus is a gift to you; follow him well.

**May we love one another, care for the earth,**

**and worship God by following Jesus Christ,**

**who laid down his life for us. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess we have not been good stewards. We have abused the resources of this planet. We have followed the idols of consumerism and productivity. We have worshiped the gods of wealth and worldly success. Holy One, we have continued the sins of our ancestors, with gods of new names. Forgive us. Call us back to You, the One, the God who made everything and all of us. Remind us that the things of this world will pass away. The resources we have must be used to love one another and to repair the earth, or they will go to waste. Call us back to Your commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Remind us that You gave us the earth as our neighborhood, and we are called to care for it and all its inhabitants, all Your children. In the name of Jesus, who gave of himself for all of us that we might have life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from John 15:12-14)

Jesus said “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you.” This is Christ’s commandment: that we love one another as he has loved us. You are loved. You are forgiven. You are restored. Go, and love one another. Care for the earth God has given us. Repair the breach. Restore what has been lost. Reconcile where you can, and live into Christ’s ways of love, justice, and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Mystery of Mysteries, You continue to inspire us in new ways, reveal to us new insights about the universe, about You, and about ourselves. Mystery of Mysteries, inspire us into new, creative ways of saving this earth, of helping one another, of restoring what has been lost. Mystery of Mysteries, guide us into the deeper insight, the Spirit of Wisdom You planted in us long ago. Mystery of Mysteries, may Your love urge us on when all seems lost, when the planet seems doomed, when justice seems but a lost hope. Reveal in us a new layer of Your love and insight, so our strength and courage may be renewed, that we may know there is still hope now and in the time to come. In the name of Jesus, whose love is the greatest mystery of all, for it conquers death—it is in His name we pray. Amen.