Worship Resources for August 26, 2018—Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Stewardship/Generosity, Mark 10:17-31 (Psalm 51:10-12)

King Solomon dedicates the temple to God in 1 Kings 8. As we follow the rise of the kings of Israel, the people who once had wandered in the wilderness have come to this place and time, where the Ark of the Covenant is set inside the temple—the Ark having been constructed while they were in the wilderness. The covenant made with the people, renewed by David, is renewed again. Scholars believe much of this was written by the Deuteronomist, during King Josiah’s reforms, and is a reminder of God’s faithfulness through the law. God is greater than the Ark, greater than the temple, but this temple is a place that even those outside of Israel will be drawn to, because of God’s name, and all people of the world will know God through this temple in Israel.

Psalm 84 is a song of praise to God for the temple. The psalmist sings of the joy of being in the temple, in the presence of God within the holy city. All those that wander, including the sparrows in the air, find a home in God’s temple. God is the one who truly shelters us, and makes us welcome.

In the second selection of the Hebrew Scriptures, Joshua asks the people, who wandered in the wilderness and have finally come to the land God has promised them, whom they will serve in Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18. What gods will they follow? Will they choose to follow the Lord, who led them out of Egypt, or the gods of the peoples surrounding them? The people respond to Joshua’s question by choosing the God who brought them out of Egypt, who brought them to this land.

The past two weeks, the second selection for the Psalm has been from Psalm 34, and we conclude this last third of the acrostic poem. God hears the cries of the righteous, but turns away from the wicked. God is near to those who are suffering, and will be their refuge, and will rescue them.

We conclude the Epistle readings to the Ephesians with 6:10-20, the Armor of God. In a world where Roman soldiers patrolled the streets, the writer of Ephesians subverts the image of armor, using it as a metaphor for how to stay faithful to God in a world where the believers were often a persecuted minority. Shoes for the gospel of peace. The belt of truth. All of this armor is meant to protect the person. The sword of the Spirit—the word of God—is the only weapon in all of this, and even then, it is meant in defense. And the word of God is love. It is not meant to be used to attack, but rather to defend, to say that love is stronger than anything that comes at us, that desires to harm us. Love is the first and last line of defense, our protection.

Jesus’ discourse on the bread from heaven concludes in John 6:56-69. Jesus declares that “those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them” (vs 56). However, Jesus also declares that the flesh is useless and that it is the spirit that gives life. Jesus is not speaking of his literal flesh and blood, but rather that the practice of the Last Supper is a spiritual practice. It is not about literally eating bread and drinking wine, but the spiritual act of communion, of becoming one with Christ, and Christ abiding with us. Those who have gathered around state that this is a difficult teaching, and Jesus acknowledges this. Some of his disciples at that point leave, but the twelve remain, knowing that in Christ they have life, as Peter declares.

The Narrative Lectionary moves to its second lesson in its three-part Stewardship series, focusing on Mark 10:17-31. In this passage, Jesus is asked by a man what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus lists off some of the commandments, and the man declares that he has kept them. So Jesus, looking at him and loving him, says that he lacks one thing, that he must sell what he owns and give the money to the poor. But the man left, shocked, because he had many possessions. Jesus tells his disciples, “How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” (vs 23). Some of the disciples wonder who can be saved, but Peter states that they’ve left everything to follow him. Jesus replies that those who have given up what they had for him will inherit eternal life in the age to come. But that many who are first will become last, and those who are last will become first.

Psalm 51:10-12 asks for God to create a clean heart with a new spirit, and to be restored to God. The psalmist, earlier in this psalm attributed to David, confessed their sins. Now they are asking to be made new, to have a new start with God.

Following the way of Jesus is difficult. It requires us to turn away from how the world has taught us: to see our possessions as things of this world that can be used to help others, not things that we store up for ourselves. To see others as our neighbors, and not as competitors. To put our focus on God, who made the world, rather than the things we made in this world. To find our joy in God, and not by having more and gaining more. To live as spiritual beings in a very physical, corporeal world. This is a difficult teaching, as the disciples knew, but it is something we must wrestle with, and ask God to create in us clean hearts, and to put a new and right spirit within us, so we can follow the ways of Christ.

Call to Worship

For all those that wander:

**Come, and find rest.**

For all those that grieve:

**Come, and find understanding.**

For all who seek justice:

**Come, and find solidarity.**

For all who seek peace:

**Come, for the Spirit is at work.**

**Come, join your hearts in this time of renewal and worship.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Rabbi Jesus, we confess that we have listened to other teachings because we found them more palatable. Giving up our possessions is too hard. Loving our neighbors is too hard. Seeking justice makes us uncomfortable. We’d rather live a life that is comfortable for us because life is too short. Forgive us for our excuses. Forgive us for not listening to You. Forgive us for not being Your disciples, Your students. Help us to follow You, to tune our hearts to Your words and Your ways. Rabbi Jesus, teach us again what it means to have hearts that love and forgive. Teach us how to love one another, to serve You by serving others, to live in the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Though we may have gone astray, God is waiting for us, and God is everywhere. God’s presence knows no bounds. Wherever we are, we are at home with God. Turn and know that God is with you. Turn away from sin and toward the loving forgiveness of God. Turn to the teachings of God, and leave the ways of this world behind. Know that you are beloved of God, and God is with you, right now. Amen.

Prayer

Grand Designer of the Universe, You constructed subatomic particles and the giant stars in our galaxy. You have made living beings, intricate and unique and complex. You made us, full of hope and wonder, but also fear and trepidation. We are still seeking to understand ourselves, to understand this universe you made, and Your ways. Help us to notice Your patterns and prints, to seek Your design, to follow Your clues in the mystery of life. May we follow the way of love, the light that shows us the way, until we see it completed. Amen.