Worship Resources for August 27th, 2017—Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Sacraments—Lord’s Supper, Psalm 65, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; or Revelation 6:1-8, 7:9-17 (John 14:1-4)

As we enter the second half of this long season after Pentecost, we move in our origins of the Hebrew People from follow Abraham, Sarah and Hagar’s family through Joseph, his brothers and their children in Egypt. Now, we start in Exodus, years after the events of Genesis, when a new king has risen who does not know Joseph, does not know the story of how Joseph’s family saved all the people from famine. This new pharaoh and the people have forgotten the stories of how they are close to the Hebrew People (in fact, Joseph had an Egyptian wife). When we forget, we become suspicious and afraid, as Pharaoh and the other leaders did of the Hebrew people, enslaving the Hebrews in order to control them.

In order to keep control, Pharaoh ordered the murders of Hebrew infant boys, to control the population, but through the brave efforts of the midwives and other women, some of the boys escaped death, including the son of a Levite family, whose sister helped him escape to the daughter of Pharaoh. Pharaoh’s daughter raised him as her own, calling him Moses, and the boy’s sister helped scheme to get her mother to be the boy’s nursemaid.

Psalm 124 sings praise to God who has delivered the people from their enemies. God has delivered them from danger, as if they have been rescued from a flood. They would have been consumed like one trapped in floodwaters, but God has helped them escape. God, the one who made heaven and earth, is also the deliverer of the people.

The prophet Isaiah calls out to the people to remember where they come from in 51:1-6. They come from the earth where God made them, and from the family of Abraham and Sarah. They have been molded and shaped by God and by their ancestors, and God will not abandon them now. God will bring deliverance and salvation; however, God warns that the heavens will vanish and earth will wear out and die. Deliverance and salvation aren’t going to be in worldly terms, but God’s salvation will be forever.

Psalm 138 gives thanks to God, who hears the voices of the lowly as well as the rulers of the earth. The psalmist declares that God has answered them, has heard their cries and strengthens their soul. The last two verses echo Psalm 23, that even when we are in the midst of trouble, God is with us, walking with us, and delivers us from evil.

Paul continues in Romans 12, declaring that we are the body of Christ and therefore our own bodies are holy, a living sacrifice to God. We come together to share in our gifts, and we do not all have the same purpose or gifts, but all are necessary. This is a common theme of Paul’s writings, that all of us have purpose and meaning and are equal before God; not one gift is greater than another, but all are needed.

Jesus asks, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” in Matthew 16:13-20. The disciples answer him with what others have said, but when Jesus asks, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter boldly declares that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus declares that Peter is the rock on which the church will be built: this fearless confession of faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. This is our only confession necessary, and the foundation of our faith as Christians.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series on the Sacraments and on Revelation. For the Lord’s Supper, the focus is Psalm 65. This call to worship God reminds the people that God is the one who performs awesome deeds of deliverance, and is all of our hope. God is the one who provides for all the earth, who forgives our transgressions, and God draws us near. Happy are those who are chosen by God to be with God.

Paul is displeased with the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. He has heard about the divisions within the church, but he is most disgusted by the divisions shown at the table for the Lord’s Supper, because they don’t really come together for this holy meal but to eat their own supper, to gorge on what they have had, to become drunk and enjoy themselves while others go hungry. This is not what the table is about. Instead, continuing from verse 23, Paul reminds the church that this is a meal of remembrance. This meal is to be taken reverently, and all need to examine themselves before coming to the table.

In the series on Revelation, from 6:1-8 and 7:9-17, the first four seals are opened, releasing the four horses associated with the apocalypse, bringing violence, hunger, famine, and pestilence upon the earth. But after the seals are opened, there is a great multitude that appear in John’s vision, no one can count them. They are of every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb and praising God. These are the ones who have come through the great ordeal, who have survived, and they come to praise God, and God will wipe away every tear from their eye. They will suffer no more.

John 14:1-4 is part of Jesus’ final discourse to the disciples, in which he promises that he is going ahead of them to prepare a place for them. Jesus promises the disciples that they know the way to the place where Jesus is going. Have faith, do not let your hearts be troubled, Jesus tells the disciples, for there is room for all in the kingdom of God.

The psalms, John’s Gospel account, Isaiah’s proclamation, Revelation, and the story of Moses remind us that God indeed delivers us. Sometimes we have to go right through those hard times, those valleys of death, but we are not alone. Christ will see us through. And even though Peter is not the perfect disciple, we can live by what he proclaims boldly: we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. All else may fail, but this we know: God’s steadfast love endures forever. As Christians, we know God’s love through Jesus the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 138)

Give thanks to God with our whole heart;

 **Give thanks for God’s steadfast love and faithfulness.**

May all the leaders of the world praise God’s name;

 **May all of us listen for the word of God.**

Sing of the ways of our God;

 **For great is the glory of God.**

Come, worship God, and praise God’s name;

 **For God’s steadfast love endures forever.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God, we look at the world and we cry out. There is so much pain and suffering. So much hate. The divisions are so deep, the wounds so raw, that we do not see healing in our near future. We do not see a way forward. We want to escape the pain but the process of healing is too hard. The process of healing means letting go of quick fixes and temporary bandages. The process of healing means draining and cleaning the wound and that hurts. It means seeing where the infection is. White supremacy is an infection that is hard to remove. Racism is imbedded in our culture. Help us to heal ourselves, O God. Help us to work on ourselves first and remove hate from our own lives so we can remove it from the world around us, knowing that You are the Great Physician, the one who truly brings healing. Help us to rely on You, O God, but to first examine ourselves and our own sin. In the name of the One Who Saves, Jesus, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are beloved by God. You are full of wounds and scars and flaws and shortcomings and yet God molded your heart in the beginning, and filled it with love. That love is always there. Come back to your first love, and know that God is with you, always. Go forth, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation, and work for justice in this world. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, into Your hands we commit our spirits. Into Your hands we commit our bodies to the work of tearing down sin. Into Your hands we commit our minds to learning to undo the ways of the world, and to re-learn Your ways of love, justice, and mercy. Into Your hands we commit ourselves anew to the work of peace, knowing that peace cannot be had without justice. Into Your hands we commit our hearts, to confess our sins before You and know that You are the one who redeems us, who sustains us, and makes us into Your beloved children. Amen.