Worship Resources for August 28th, 2016—Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 2:4-13 or Proverbs 25:6-7; Psalm 81:1, 10-16 or Psalm 112; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

Narrative Lectionary: The Lord’s Prayer, Luke 11:2-4

God questions the motives of the people through the prophet Jeremiah. Using rhetorical questions, God accuses the people for turning away from God and following the prophets of Baal, for God did not abandon them, God did not leave them—but the people left God. God accuses the people of leaving their God—this is not something that other nations have done, and something that the people ought to know better, because God is the Creator, and has been with them since the beginning. The people have tried to do things their own way—creating cisterns that are cracked and cannot hold water, instead of looking to God who is the source of living water.

Wisdom in Proverbs 25 advises that it is better to sit in a lower position and be asked to move up, rather than be asked to move down in the presence of the elite. This passage will be remembered by Jesus in the Gospel lesson below.

Psalm 81:1, 10-16 calls for the congregation to sing praise to God, and the leader tells of God’s deeds who brought the people out of Egypt. But the people turned their back on God, and God had let them live with the consequences of their actions. However, God desires that the people would listen and turn back to God’s ways.

Psalm 112 declares that those who follow in God’s ways will find satisfaction in right-living. Those who walk in the ways of righteousness will know the fullness of God; those who give freely to those who are in need live in God’s ways. Those who follow wickedness will never be satisfied.

In this final chapter of Hebrews, in 13:1-8, 15-16 the writer exhorts the readers to remain faithful to one another in love by showing hospitality to strangers and visiting those in prison, as if they were in prison with them. The writer also reminds them to be faithful to their spouse, but also be faithful to one another in upholding relationships before God. The writer encourages them to remember that Christ is always with them, and continue to give thanksgiving and praise to God.

Jesus tells a parable that isn’t like his usual parables in Luke 14. In the verses omitted by the Lectionary, a woman had come to the house of the Pharisee, a woman who was known as a sinner in Luke’s account, and had anointed Jesus. To the one who was hosting the dinner, he grumbled that Jesus wouldn’t have let the woman touch him if had known what kind of a woman she was. And that’s what prompts Jesus to tell this parable that isn’t really a parable, but rather a lesson in how to live humbly and how to show hospitality. The common theme of Jesus’ teaching, the last shall be first and the first shall be last, is echoed in this lesson on humility.

The Narrative Lectionary follows the same passage for four weeks, Luke 11:2-4. Here are my reflections from two weeks ago:

Luke’s account is very short and doesn’t include all of the words Protestants use in the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. All Jesus includes is this: Father, hallowed be your name (God our Parent/Father: your name is holy). Your Kingdom Come (God’s beloved community, God’s kin-dom, God’s reign, come). Give us each day our daily bread (fulfill our daily needs). And forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone indebted to us (forgive others because you are forgiven; forgive others the things you ask for forgiveness for; forgive us, because we forgive others). And do not bring us to the time of trial (do not bring us to that point where we are tested beyond what we can face). That’s it—five statements. Five you can remember on your fingers. Five things we should pray for—the first two really are statements to God, not asking for anything, until we get to our daily bread, asking for forgiveness, and to not be led into trial.

It has been ingrained in us to put ourselves first to survive. Get in line first because there may not be enough at the end. Take the best now because you’ll be left with scraps later. Put yourself first or you will get walked all over. But this is the opposite of the reign of God, the kin-dom of Jesus: those who humble themselves will be exalted. Those who give out of all they have will be lifted up. Those who put themselves last will be asked to move forward because they put the needs of others first. This was the problem of the elite in Jeremiah’s day—they had put themselves first every time to the point that they went after the flashy gods of their neighbors, because they always desired what others had, rather than serving their God, the Creator of all.

Call to Worship:

When the floodwaters rise,

**The Spirit is with us in the waters.**

When the wildfires rage,

**God is shielding us in the midst of the flames.**

When the storms are raging,

**Christ is calling for the storms to calm.**

When the world is full of overwhelming struggle and strife,

**We gather together to worship God, because God leads us into life.**

**Come, lift up your prayers amongst the body of Christ, and worship God together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Sometimes, God, it is all too much. The natural disasters are too much. The violence in the world is too much. The poverty of children is too much. The suffering of those who are ill or in pain is too much. There is too much wrong with this world. Renew our strength, O God, to endure. Lift up our hearts, O God, to love our neighbor as ourselves. Encourage our spirits, O God, to strive for Your reign, Your kingdom, Your beloved community, knowing that Your love will remain forever. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Day by day, we are renewed, restored, forgiven and loved. Day by day, we grow into the person God has intended us to be. You are loved exactly as you are. Go, love others, and serve God by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.

Gardener of Life, plant seeds in us of humility and meekness. Nurture in us the spirit of gentleness and kindness. Help us to thrive in a world without good soil, in which we must at times dig in to take deep root. Water us so that we are ready to grow into who You have intended us to be, and may Your light shine on us to feed us with hope, peace, and love. In the name of Christ, who appeared in the garden at the resurrection, we pray. Amen.