Worship Resources for August 30th, 2015—Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Song of Solomon 2:8-13 or Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9; Psalm 15 or Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Narrative Lectionary: Hebrews 9:1-14

This Sunday marks a transition in our first choice in the Hebrew Scriptures during this season after Pentecost. We have been reading through the Rise of the Kings—Saul, David, and now Solomon. This week, we move from Solomon as King to Solomon the Wise, and will be reading from the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Scriptures throughout the rest of this season.

This first thread begins with a selection from the Song of Solomon, love poetry that has been attributed to Solomon historically, containing beautiful love poems between a groom and bride on their wedding day. The references to springtime and beauty capture the awareness of young love, in those early days, when everything is wonderful and the possibilities for love are endless.

Our second thread has followed the prophets. Moses reminds the people before they enter the land promised to them to not forget God’s commandments and to not forget what they have witnessed. They have witnessed God’s faithfulness, but also what happens when they reject God and go astray from God’s ways. The people are to be witnesses of God’s faithfulness to other nations as well, so that other nations will be in awe of their wisdom.

In Psalm 15, the psalmist asks in this short psalm who may dwell with God? The singer answers their own question: those who do what God has called them to do, who do what is right, speak the truth from their heart, treat their neighbor fairly, and live honestly.

Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9 is the song of a royal coronation and a royal wedding. This short selection from the Psalm, paired with the Song of Solomon reading, praises God whose reign endures forever, and calls a blessing upon the king and his bride.

We being the first in five readings from the Letter of James, which reminds us in verse 17 that “Religion pure and undefiled is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep one’s self unstained by the world.” The writer calls those listening to be doers of the word, not just those that hear it. We are called not to be guided by anger and rage, but rather by compassion. We are called to do the right thing and help those in need around us—this is what it means to be faithful to God.

The verses selected from Mark 7 illustrate a great difference between Jesus and some of those teaching in his day. Jesus is much more concerned with how you treat others than following traditional rules. Jesus and his disciples are called out for not washing their hands—and this had nothing to do with hygiene but rather ritual “cleaning” of one’s self from anything unclean—that is, sinful. Jesus calls out the way we treat others, the things we say about other people, what we do that harms others—this is what is truly unclean, not whether one pours water over their hands or not.

The Narrative Lectionary continues in the Letter to the Hebrews with chapter 9. In these verses, the writer explains the temple and the sacrificial system that is in place, and that Jesus is the last and final sacrifice, entering the Holy of Holies where only the high priest could go. Jesus is both the high priest and final sacrifice, ending the sacrificial system and the need for atonement for sins, for our sins are forgiven and nothing is holding us back from life now, and eternal life that endures.

As Christians we often say we are “in the world but not of the world.” The way of the world calls us to seek wealth, success, and material satisfaction, and to have those treasures here on earth and to hoard them for a later point in this life. The way of God calls us to live for others, to seek the welfare of strangers, to shed possessions that possess us, and instead to store up treasures in heaven. We are reminded in Christ that eternal life begins now—not after we die—and endures forever. How we live now matters for eternity. In the words of Pete Seeger from his song “God’s Counting On Me, God’s Counting On You,” remember this: “What we do now, you and me, will effect eternity, God’s counting on me, God’s counting on you.”

Call to Worship

Enter this time and place for prayer:

**Open our hearts, O God, so we might receive you.**

Incline your ear to the Lord:

**Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.**

Listen for the word of God:

**May our hearts and minds be open to You,**

**and may we receive Your Spirit of wisdom and guidance in our lives,**

**today and every day. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Jesus, You have taught us how to live, to love our neighbors as ourselves, but we have rejected Your ways. We have sought our own way, thinking we know best, that we are most important. Forgive us of our selfishness and our self-centeredness. Call us into active repentance, seeking the welfare of those in need around us, and working for justice for the oppressed. For You lived Your life, Gave Your life, and live again, all for us. In Your precious name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Jesus reminds us that it’s how we live for others that is important. Seek forgiveness, repent and turn back to God, and know that God is always counting on us to do the right thing. Sometimes it takes some of us longer than others to figure it out, but God is there every step of the way with us, calling us back to the way God intended for us, an abundant life filled with hope. May we be filled with enough hope to bring it to others, in all that we say and do. Amen.

Prayer

Author of Life, You have written into our very being compassion and grace. You have filled our hearts with love. At times we deny these gifts, believing there is only enough for ourselves. May we pour out Your love, grace and compassion into this world that it overwhelms the injustice and evil we face. Grant us the awareness of the needs around us and the ability to give of ourselves, so that we might live into Your beloved community here on earth as it is in heaven. In the name of Christ, who has shown us The Way, we pray. Amen.