Worship Resources for August 30th, 2020—Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 3:1-15 and Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45b; Jeremiah 15:15-21 and Psalm 26:1-8; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

Narrative Lectionary: Series on the Lord’s Prayer, Luke 11:2-4

Moses encounters God in a burning bush in Exodus 3:1-15. The God of Moses’ ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, called out to Moses from the burning bush, for God had seen the people’s oppression and heard their cry. God had come to deliver the people out of Egypt into the land promised their ancestors, and God declared that Moses would go before Pharaoh to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. But Moses said, “Who am I to go?” God told Moses that God would be with him. However, Moses persisted. “If I tell the people that the God of our ancestors has sent me, what do I say God’s name is?” God responded with, “I AM has sent you.” I AM (or I WILL BE) is the God of the ancestors of the people, and God will be with you, for God’s name is alive: Being.

Similar portions of Psalm 105 were part of the lectionary reading on August 9th. The first six verses call for the people of Israel, the children of Jacob to praise God in a call to worship. The psalmist continues from there, sharing how God has been with the people, with their ancestors, since the beginning. In verses 23-26, the psalmist sings of Israel coming to Egypt, and how God made the people fruitful. When Egypt turned on the Israelites, God chose Moses and Aaron to send to the Israelites, to tell Pharaoh to let them go.

The second selection of the Hebrew scriptures follows the prophets. In Jeremiah 15:15-21, the passage reads like a psalm of lament, for the work of the prophet is excruciatingly hard for him to accomplish. Jeremiah has taken the call seriously, and he knows that the people will be taken into exile and not listen to him. He knows he will suffer their same fate. Yet God promises that if Jeremiah tells the truth, serving as the mouthpiece of God, he will be delivered, for God will be with him.

The psalmist pleads for justice in Psalm 26:1-8. They know before God they have been true, and they seek God’s deliverance and vindication. They have not kept company with those who are evil, but have clung to the way of God and have lived in faithfulness, telling all of God’s wonderful works. The psalmist concludes this section with praise and admiration for the temple, where God dwells.

Paul continues his discourse to the church in Rome, speaking of the Christian way of life and instruction to believers in Romans 12:9-21. Live with integrity, and let your actions speak of Christ in you. Paul encourages the Romans to be patient and faithful even while suffering, for this is a church that has known persecution in the past. Paul discourages revenge and instead encourages, as far as it is possible, peaceful living, praying for those who are persecutors, and overcoming evil with good.

Matthew 16:21-28 picks up right after Jesus told Peter that he was the rock the church would be built on. Right after Peter’s bold declaration that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, Jesus began to teach how he would suffer, be killed, and on the third day rise. Peter pulled Jesus aside and rebuked him. Peter clearly did not understand who Jesus was, even though he made that bold declaration. He did not understand that the people would continue to reject God, and that his rebuke was a rejection of God. Jesus’ words are sharp and painful: Get behind me Satan. Peter was thinking only of losing his friend and how awful it would be for him to die, and not what God was doing through Jesus, defeating death and sin. Jesus then turned to his disciples and told them that if they wanted to be his follower, they must take up their cross and deny themselves. They must deny their very human nature—the quest for immortality—and instead, put to death what was holding them back from following Jesus. Death cannot stop the reign of God.

(Same as previous two weeks) The Narrative Lectionary continues its four-part series on the Lord’s Prayer, the same scripture each week of Luke 11:2-4. See Working Preacher’s commentary and suggestions for preaching this series: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2919> Here is the reflection I wrote back in 2016: 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.

Following God is never easy. Poor Jeremiah suffered and was humiliated, and yet, Jeremiah found the joy of living into God’s ways despite the broken world around him, and trusted that God would deliver him. The disciples had to learn the hard way that Jesus was not ascending a worldly throne, but establishing a heavenly reign. Death was something they wanted to avoid, but death is the only way to life—dying to the ways of this world leads us to the reign of God.

Call to Worship

**Join in the journey, and follow Jesus,**

**The way is not easy, but it is worth it.**

**Love one another, and serve one another,**

**Because those who lose their lives for Christ will find it.**

**Seek the Lord and live, seek Christ and know love,**

**Come, worship God, and know the Spirit is alive in you.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Sojourning God, You have called us on a difficult journey. We come with so much baggage: guilt, shame, fear, and longing. We remember how things used to be in our minds, forgetting that the way has always been difficult. We long for an easier path in this world, with wealth and security, and without the struggles we face in our own lives. Christ, You have called us to hand over our burdens to You, to take up the cross and follow You. You have shown us that we must deny the façade of ease that is promised in this world, and instead, do the heard work of justice, showing mercy, practicing compassion and kindness. May we have the strength to let go of our baggage, to let go of the longing for the world’s false promises, and instead, take up our cross and follow You. In Your name we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Matthew 11:28-30)

“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Come, give over your burdens to Christ, let go of what holds you back, and know that you are loved, welcomed, and embraced by God. Go and share the love of Christ with all. Amen.

Prayer

Blazing God, may Your Spirit burn in our lives. May we be set on fire to bring justice. Help us to speak the truth in love, to not hold back the hard reality, but to speak and live in ways that build up people and burn down structures of oppression. Your Spirit is a purifying fire. Help us to burn down the empire, the systems of destruction. Help us to burn away the ropes and chains of this world that hold us back from living fully into Your covenant. Purify our hearts, so we may be holy before You. Holy Spirit, burn bright in us. Amen.