Worship Resources for August 31st, 2014—Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Our first thread through the Hebrew Scriptures follows the stories of our ancestors as they went from a small family to a great nation. We read today the call of Moses, his experience of God in the burning bush, and his question of “who am I?” and “who are you?” Moses wonders who he is that God would call him to lead his people into freedom, and he wonders who this God is that is calling him, and what should he tell the people? God tells Moses that God is the God of their ancestors, of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebekkah, of Jacob and Joseph and all their family of ancestors. This is the same God who led them to a new home, who led them out of famine, who will lead them into freedom.

Our second thread follows the prophets, and Jeremiah speaks of his own faithfulness to God while the people were faithless, how he took the words of God on the scroll and ate it, a symbol of internalizing God’s word. Though Jeremiah has suffered, God has also looked upon the suffering of the people and promises that if they turn back, God will welcome them with open arms. God will deliver the people from their enemies. God will see them through, even though they have turned away from God. Jeremiah is bitter for his suffering, but also knows that God is the God of deliverance.

Psalm 26:1-8 is a plea to God from the psalmist, that they have not strayed from God’s ways though others have. They have remained faithful and pray for God to vindicate them, for they know God’s steadfast love never ends. They are innocent, they have followed God’s ways, and they trust that God will see them through.

Psalm 105:1-6, 23-36, 45b sings praises to God who is the same God of the people’s ancestors, who was faithful to Abraham and Sarah, who led the people out of famine into plenty in Egypt, and God blessed them there, and God sent them Moses and Aaron to deliver them out of slavery into freedom. The psalmist calls upon the congregation to sing in memory of what God has done for their ancestors, and what God will do for them.

Romans 12:9-21 contains Paul’s teachings to the Romans about the faithful life—to live into God’s ways of love and hope, to help those who are in need, and to live in peace as much as possible. Paul tells the Romans to overcome evil with good, to love their enemies—echoing the teachings of Christ in the Gospels.

Matthew 16:21-28 is the follow-up to Peter’s declaration of faith that was the lectionary reading last week. In the very next paragraph, after Peter declares that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of the Living God, Jesus tells the disciples that he will be betrayed, arrested, and die at the hands of human beings, and be raised on the third day—and Peter begins to rebuke him. Peter, who was so quick to raise his hand with the correct answer, betrays his own lack of understanding of who Jesus is. Jesus rebukes him with the famous words, “Get behind me, Satan!” Jesus tells the disciples that if they truly want to understand, if they really want to know what it means to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, they must become like him—they must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. What is it that holds them back from following Christ that they must put to death?

What holds us back from following Christ? Are we able to love our enemies and bless those who persecute us? Are we able to help those in need? Are we able to trust in God though we are going through difficult times? What is it that holds you back from following Christ? Remember our ancestors, how they trusted and followed God, and God continued to lead them out of darkness into light. Trust God, for it is the same God who raised Jesus from the dead.

Call to Worship

We come from different backgrounds, different histories, different places;

**We follow the same Christ who leads us into New Life.**

We have different faith experiences, different ways we have known God;

**But the same Christ calls us to love our neighbor as ourselves.**

Though our lives have been different, the same Christ calls us now,

**May we enter this time of worship remembering that Christ makes us one. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Christ, we confess we have not followed Your ways. We have insisted our own way is the right way over others. We have placed tradition as more important than relationship. We have clung to our ways because it is too hard to change. We have failed to see the ones who have been hurt, or have dismissed them. Forgive us for our selfish ways, and call us into the ways of love, in which traditions deepen our relationships, and we work together to build up Your church, open to the ways that relationships with others encourage us to change and grow. Help us to be Your body, all different members but joined together. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God sets our feet on the right paths when we go astray. God restores us when we fall and lifts us up. We do not walk this journey alone. Know that God is with you, and God has provided companions along the way, for we are the body of Christ, and we are joined together. You are not alone. You are a beloved child of God and part of Christ’s body forever. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of the Universe, You knit us together, creating us to be the person we are. Help us to embrace our humanity. Help us to embrace our flaws, knowing that You know our strengths and edges, and that You are always at work to build us up. Help us to embrace all of who we are, even if the world is not ready for us. Help us to love ourselves as You first loved us, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Help us to remember that we are fearfully and wonderfully made in Your image. You love us so much You sent Your son, Jesus the Christ, so that in him we may have life abundantly, and life eternally. We thank You and praise You. Help us to live our lives as a response to Your love in us. Amen.