Worship Resources for August 4th—Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Hosea 11:1-11 or Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14, and 2:18-23; Psalm 107:1-9, 43 or Psalm 49:1-12; Luke 12:13-21; Colossians 3:1-11

We hear the Good News of God’s deliverance from the prophet Hosea. Hosea has had to live his life as an example of God’s relationship with Israel. Hosea has suffered humiliation by marrying a prostitute. Hosea has had to speak out for God’s judgment when it was not popular, and has paid for it with his reputation and life. But through his relationship, he understands God’s compassion and love. Just as Hosea loves his children, so God loves Israel, and God will not abandon Israel forever. God loves Israel so much that even though Israel has fallen away and rejected God, God cannot reject Israel. God will even defend Israel as a parent defends a child.

The selections from Ecclesiastes, from one of the Wisdom books, shares the Teacher’s (the writer of Ecclesiastes) view that much of human life is a “chasing after wind.” What is often translated as “vanity” in the New Revised Standard Version is more closely related to mist or vapor—something that appears but we can’t grasp it, can’t attain it. The work we do for things, for earthly success—this is vanity, a chasing after wind. This passage marks a break in our thread of following God’s keeping of the covenant, though the last two verses of chapter 2 show that when we enjoy our work, when we have enjoyment from what we are doing in our lives, there is nothing better than this. Perhaps this is a response of God from the covenant—to those who are faithful, perhaps there is more joy in one’s life, more fulfillment. The old question of if it all turned out to be false, if there was no God or heaven, did we waste our lives can be answered by the Teacher: no. The vanity and chasing after wind is worrying about the question. The joy is found in living one’s life for God.

Psalm 107:1-9, 43 begins with the singing of God’s praise for deliverance of the people. The final verse harkens back to Wisdom, that those who are wise, those who seek God’s ways, recognize that God is the one who brings deliverance, God is the one who gathers, who rescues, who redeems—and ultimately, who cares for all, especially those on the margins such as the poor and the hungry.

Psalm 49:1-12 sings from the Wisdom tradition about the importance of one’s life, for both the wise and the foolish face the same fate. Fools trust in riches, while the wise trust in God. For us today, with the economy over the past five years, we know the folly of trusting in riches, in stock markets, in corporations and conglomerates. Our trust must be in God, and our work must be for this life for God.

Luke 12:13-21 contains the Parable of the Rich Fool. Falling into the Wisdom tradition, we hear from Jesus’ own words that storing up treasures on earth is not worth it. We are called to live our lives for God, and that requires us to live our lives for others, especially for those who fall through the cracks of life. Jesus tells us that whoever is first must become last of all and servant of all. We cannot become last when we are busy storing up our own treasures in bigger barns.

Colossians 3:1-11 shares that in God we must live our lives for Christ. We cannot live in the worldly ways, seeking worldly success, living off of worldly pleasures. We must live a better way, for God, which requires us to become a new person, a new creation that lives for God and not for the foolishness of the world that puts one’s self above others.

What are you living your life for? The foolish live their lives solely for their own pleasures on earth and ignore the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized. The Wisdom Tradition of the Bible tells us this is vanity, a chasing after wind, something that will never be fully realized or satisfied. Life is empty. On the other hand, the foolish also live their lives focused solely on heaven and not caring about this life or the people in this world. The wise look to living their lives for God, which means living for others. We are called to love and care for others, but especially the ones in need. With that, we live with the hope of resurrection, knowing that life continues after death, though we may not know what that looks like, we hold on to that hope. We live our lives on earth with the same hope for eternity—to live into God’s ways of love and justice that restores and heals and brings wholeness.

Call to Worship

We have one life, a gift from God

 **May we live this life for God by loving others**

Turn away from the temptations of wealth and power

 **Turn away from the foolishness of this world**

Come into this time of worship, turning your focus onto God

 **May we seek forgiveness, do justice, and love our neighbor as ourselves**

Come, now is the time to worship

 **Come, now is the time for us to give thanks and praise to God. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, come into our lives and stitch us together where we have torn apart. Bind us together where we have become loose and have lost connection. Heal us by helping us to seek forgiveness and to give forgiveness when relationships have been hurt or broken. Great Physician, bring us healing, bring us wholeness, bring us love that is greater than ourselves. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, for all are one in Christ Jesus. There is no longer broken or unbroken, for all are made into a new creation. The old has passed away; see, you are something new in Christ! Go and live into this good news. Amen.

Prayer

Savior God, we claim to not need saving, and then we cry out to You to save us from our foolish ways. The world tempts us greatly to seek our own fame and wealth and success. Help us to turn away from the world and to follow You, because You lead us into life. You are our Strong Deliverer, our Redeemer, our Rescuer, our Savior. Call us away from the busy-ness of the world. Call us so that we hear Your voice above the voices of the world that lead us astray. In Your name, our Savior and Friend, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.