Worship Resources for August 4th, 2019—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Hebrews, 9:1-14 (Matthew 12:1-6)

The first selection of the Hebrew scriptures continues following the prophet Hosea. This time, instead of comparing Israel to an unfaithful wife, God compares Ephraim (another name for Israel) to a child who goes astray. Instead of understanding God’s love and care, they have gone after other idols, and therefore, God will return them to captivity. As they once were in Egypt, now they shall be exiled in Assyria. But God cannot give them up. God will bring some out of exile, some will return home, for God is not mortal. God forgives, and God restores.

Psalm 107:1-9, 43 sings of God’s redemption of Israel, gathering the people out of exile. The people hunger and thirst for God, and God will deliver them from their distress. God’s love is steadfast, and God will satisfy the hungry and thirsty (foreshadowing a line from Mary’s Magnificat in Luke 1).

The writer of Ecclesiastes, the Teacher, speaks of the vanity of life, that much of the world we have made is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Purporting to be the king (and historically thought to be Solomon), the writer speaks of the vanity of trying to work for worldly things. The writer finds despair in the ways of the world, for they work and another benefits—even among the wise—when it comes to worldly possessions and measures of success.

The psalmist also sings of the helplessness of the wise in Psalm 49:1-12. The wise and the foolish leave the gains of their work to others, for all work for worldly goods. The psalmist declares one should not fear those who put their trust in worldly riches, for there is no ransom for one’s life that is a worthy price before God. Human beings put their faith and trust in the wrong things, hoping to leave a worldly legacy, which means nothing in death.

The writer of Colossians reminds us to seek the things that are above. We are called to set our minds on things that matter to God, not on things that matter in this world. We have died to this way of life and have risen with Christ. The writer calls us to put to death our worldly desires: greed (which is idolatry), passion, evil desire, fornication—the things that cause us to seek worldly and temporary satisfaction. We are called to get rid of our old ways of abusive language, slander, lies and malice. Instead, we are clothed with a new self. Our outer manners reflect our inner nature. In this, there is no distinction among believers—we are all one in Christ.

Jesus tells a parable after being asked a question by an argumentative brother in Luke 12:13-21. One brother asks Jesus to tell his brother to divide his inheritance with him. However, Jesus responds by asking, “who appointed me judge over you?” Jesus then warns the crowd to be careful of greed, because life isn’t about possessions. He then tells a story of a rich man whose land produced abundantly, and he ran out of room to store his grain. He decided to tear down those barns and build bigger ones instead. God came to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded of you.” The man could have given away the excess grain to those in need, or shared it with his workers, but instead, he thought the way to satisfy his soul was to store up more grain, more worldly wealth. Jesus warns that his fate is what it will be for those who store up treasures for themselves, but are not rich toward God.

The Narrative Lectionary continues its series on Hebrews with 9:1-14. Christ is the High Priest, who entered once for all into the Holy of Holies with his own blood as the sacrifice, obtaining eternal redemption. We worship the living God, who became the final sacrifice for all for forgiveness of sins, abolishing the system of sacrifice once for all.

Jesus’ last words in Matthew 12:1-6 declare that something greater than the temple is there, that God’s presence is greater. When some of the religious leaders accuse Jesus’ disciples of breaking the sabbath by eating heads of grain, Jesus reminds them that David ate the bread of the Presence, which was against the temple rules. Jesus also reminds them that the priests themselves have to break the sabbath in order to be in the temple, but no one minds that. Jesus reminds them that God is present now, and that is greater than the temple, for the temple and law are designed to point to God; however, God is already among them.

We strive for something greater than ourselves—we strive for the reign of God, on earth as it is in heaven. We set our sights on God’s ways. However, too often this has been interpreted to mean that the things in this world don’t matter at all, only faith in Jesus Christ matters, and other things are simply “social concerns.” This is not what Jesus spoke of at all. Instead, Jesus warned against worldly measures of success, especially wealth, and instead, in this life now we ought to love our neighbor and use our resources to help one another. Our worldly resources will pass away—we cannot take them with us—and instead, we are called to live for others and not for ourselves. If we try to store up treasure, even riches for our descendants, this is vanity, a chasing after wind, a striving for something that doesn’t really exist. What does exist are people and our relationships—our neighbors. We ought not to desire dividing resources with our siblings; rather, we ought to remember we are all God’s children and we ought to share what we have for others in working toward the reign of God.

Call to Worship

You have been raised with Christ;

**May we seek the way of God, and not worldly measures of success.**

Set your minds on things that are above,

**For wealth and notoriety will fade and pass away.**

Put to death the worldly ways in your life: greed, envy, idolatry.

**For Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.**

Enter this time of worship for rest and renewal;

**In Christ, we are remade in the image of our Creator,**

**for we worship God, to whom we all belong.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess to You, our Creator, that we have created idols of wealth, notoriety, and other measures of worldly success. We have sought to have more, to gain more, to be more to others, instead of humbling ourselves before You. You made this world and gave us all we need, and called us to share our resources with our neighbors, to love one another. We have abandoned Your ways and sought our own. We have put our trust in the world rather than in You. We have allowed selfishness and greed into our hearts and betrayed our neighbors whom we were called to love. Forgive us for this warped understanding of life. Forgive us for our skewed vision. Forgive us for disregarding Your commandments and living into this world. Call us back into Your reign. May we put to death the ways of this world that have invaded our hearts and lives, and live again in Your image. May we renew Your intention in our lives to love our neighbors as ourselves, to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with you. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Our God is a God of life, a God of renewal, a God of resurrection. God is making all things new, including your hearts, including your lives—including you. Know the power of God’s redemption. Seek forgiveness and offer forgiveness. Seek peace and offer peace. Pursue justice, and journey in faith with others. You are restored, and the image of God lives in you forever. Amen.

Prayer

To the Only Wise God our Savior, lead us in the ways of Wisdom. May we keep the commandments close to our heart. May the cries of the prophets, the whispers of the sages, the teachings of the elders of long ago be renewed in us. May we seek the deeper way of insight, to intentionally love one another and seek justice. May this become our way of life, and not something we only pay lip service to. For all things we pray in the name of Jesus the Christ, the one who lived into the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and calls us by name. Amen.