Worship Resources for August 6, 2016—Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 32:22-31 and Psalm 17:1-7, 15; Isaiah 55:1-5 and Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:13-21

Narrative Lectionary: Ephesians 6:10-20 (Matthew 10:28-31)

After Jacob flees Laman, the father of Jacob’s wives, Jacob heads out to face another adversary: his brother Esau. However, on the way, Jacob and his family cross a river, and after Jacob makes sure his family is safely across, he is alone, and meets a stranger. He and the stranger wrestle until daybreak, when the stranger, overcome by Jacob, strikes Jacob on the hip socket. But even though his hip is out of joint, Jacob will not let the stranger go until the stranger blesses him. Jacob has recognized that this stranger is a messenger (angel) of God. The angel gives Jacob a new name, Israel, one who wrestles with God. The stranger would not tell Jacob his name, but Jacob knew he had seen God face to face.

The psalmist pleads with God to hear their prayer for deliverance from their enemies in Psalm 17:1-7, 15. The psalmist pleads their cause, that they are without evil or violence, and they have put their trust in God, who will answer them. The psalmist states that they will see God’s face, even if it may be only in a dream or vision, but they will behold God’s face in righteousness.

The prophet Isaiah declares on behalf of God in 55:1-5 that God is the one who provides. Come to God, where no money is required, and be fed and freed. God is the one who made a covenant with David and will make a covenant with the people. David was a witness to the people of God’s grace and mercy; the people will now be a witness to all nations of God’s grace and mercy.

Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21 declares that God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, just and kind, and near to those who call upon God’s name. The psalmist praises God for all these attributes, knowing that God is with the righteous, and the wicked will meet their end.

We continue in Romans with 9:1-5, where Paul announces he would give himself up for the sake of his own people to know Christ. Paul loves the history, the law, the covenants and worship. Paul knows that while Christ has been revealed through this relationship with Jewish history, it can also be a stumbling point for both Jews and Gentiles. But Paul is convinced, as by the previous chapter, that there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus has been preaching and healing all day and is tired, but in Matthew 14:13-21, the disciples want to send the crowds away to fend for themselves. But Jesus tells them, “You give them something to eat.” The disciples were astonished. They only had five loaves and two fish. Not nearly enough to feed the crowds, and to be honest, they just wanted to sit down and have a quiet meal themselves. But Jesus says, “Bring them to me,” and he orders the people to sit down on the grass, blesses and breaks the bread, and gives it to the people. And lo and behold, there are even leftovers. Because the disciples were coming from a fear of scarcity, whereas Jesus was trusting in God’s abundance.

The Narrative Lectionary concludes its series on Ephesians with 6:10-20, the Armor of God. All of the armor described is defensive except for the Sword of the Spirit, the word of God, and even then, because of all the other descriptors, this is also to be used in defense, not offense. The writer asks for the reader to pray for them, to be fearless as they share the Gospel. The armor of God is to help us be fearless in sharing the Good News, not to be a weapon.

Jesus tells the disciples, “Don’t be afraid,” in Matthew 10:28-31. Don’t be afraid of what can harm the body, for God is with us, and God has given us the promise of eternity. But rather be afraid of what can bind both soul and body in hell: evil. Sin, especially systemic sin, can bind both body and soul.

Do we live out our faith from a place of fear, or from a place of hope? Do we live out our faith from scarcity or abundance? Do we live out our faith from suspicion, or from joy? Fear, scarcity, suspicion all can hold us back. But living into God’s extravagant and abundant love, we know God’s promise of love eternal. We can move into the world with joy, see opportunities where there are challenges, and be prepared to share the Good News of God’s Love in Jesus Christ.

Call to Worship

Do not let your hearts be troubled.

 **Believe in God, and trust in Jesus Christ.**

Christ has gone to prepare a place for us,

 **And Christ has shown us the way.**

Even when we are afraid, and the path seems unknown,

 **God is with us each step of the way.**

Come, worship God, who leads us into life.

 **Come, follow Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, we come before You, confessing that we feel we don’t have enough. We desire more space, more resources, more time, because we look at what we have and we don’t know how we can accomplish what we think we need to. We look at what others have and see ourselves only in contrast by what we don’t have. Forgive us for our narrow lens. Call us to view through Your lens: You created the world and all its bounty for us to share and cultivate. You created us to care for the earth and for one another. You created our lives to be measured not by the accumulation of things but by how much we love. You sent us Jesus, the Only Son, so that we might live by his example. You sent us Jesus, our Teacher, so that we might learn Your ways of loving our neighbor as ourselves. You sent us Jesus, our Messiah, so we might be saved from the ways of the world we created, and instead embrace Your way of life. Call us back to the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

For God, nothing is impossible. For God, there is no place where we can go too far, no depth too far to fall, where God cannot find us and bring us back. For God, all things are made new and restoration, reconciliation, and resurrection are all possibilities, and realities. You are restored, reconciled, and have the promise of resurrection in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Feast, You invite each of us to the table. Sometimes we hog one side of the table, and cannot see the same view as those who sit across from us. Sometimes we claim the head of the table, but Your table is round and there are plenty of seats for everyone. Sometimes we refuse to sit next to others, forgetting that You invited them to be there. Sometimes we scarf down our food instead of enjoying the variety of flavors, appreciating how everything has been prepared for us. Help us to remember that we are also Your servants. Help us to remember to extend the invitation, to welcome others to a seat, to make others comfortable, and to serve others before ourselves, for there is plenty to go around. God of the Feast, the Banquet Table, we come before You humbled, ready to serve others, and hungry for Your Word, thirsty for the Water of Life. Amen.