Worship Resources for August 9th, 2015—Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 18:5-9, 15, 31-33 or 1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34:1-8 or Psalm 130; Ephesians 4:25-5:2; John 6:35, 41-51

Narrative Lectionary: Hebrews 1:1-4

To understand what is happening in the first selection from the Hebrew Scriptures for this day, you have to go back to chapter 13. David has many children from his different wives, and Absalom and Tamar were brother and sister from the same mother, Maacah (the different wives and children of David are found listed in chapter 3). But Amnon was David’s firstborn son. Amnon, Tamar’s half-brother, desired Tamar for himself and he raped her. Absalom waited for almost two years before killing Amnon in revenge. In the years the followed, David forgave Absalom for killing Amnon, but Absalom tries to take control from Hebron, one of the former capitols of Israel. By the time we get to chapter 18, Absalom and David have been at war, though David wishes for Absalom’s life to be spared. However, Absalom gets his head stuck in a tree (verse 9) and is killed. David grieves his death.

Our second thread follows the prophets, and Elijah in 1 Kings is very down, feeling very defeated, to the point he does not want to get up. He has been persecuted by the prophets of Baal and by Jezebel and Ahab, and he is ready to die, he feels all alone. However, an angel keeps making him get up and eat, and after the angel does this twice, Elijah has the strength to go on.

Psalm 34 has been split into three readings for the next three weeks: this week is verses 1-8. The psalm begins with praising God who has brought deliverance, who has answered the prayer and plea of the singer. This selection concludes with the psalmist invoking the sense of taste: “Taste and see that the Lord is good!” In the daily food we eat, we can taste the goodness of God who has provided for us.

Psalm 130 is a plea for God’s deliverance and help. The psalmist knows that in God there is forgiveness and hope, and that the psalmist waits for God alone, that no one else can provide the way God can. The singer calls upon the people to put their hope and trust in God who is the one who redeems them.

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 contain some practical advice for the early Church community about daily life. The writer emphasizes that anger is something that can be used for good (anger can lead us to the cause of justice) but not to let anger cause division, and to “not make room for the devil”—in other words, do not let anger turn to hate and rage. The writer also calls for people to turn away from the ways of evil, which may even be simply survival methods such as stealing to eat—but fellow Christians should give an opportunity to work and encourage right behavior, especially to give up gossiping and slander. We are called to forgive and love one another in the way Christ has forgiven and loved us.

John 6:35, 41-51 contains Jesus’ reference to the Bread of Heaven. Jesus uses the story of God providing manna in the wilderness to the people as an image of who he is—sent by God to provide for the people, that they will never hunger for God again because God is with them. Some of the religious people around him complain—they know this Jesus, they know Mary and Joseph—how can Jesus say he is from heaven when they have known him his whole life? Jesus later declares he is The Way, and the use of the image of the Bread of Heaven, the Bread of Life, is that in Jesus we have come to know God, God’s ways of love and justice, and that God is present with us, now.

The Narrative Lectionary will follow the Letter to the Hebrews for the next five weeks. We begin with the first four verses. The letter declares that God once spoke through the prophets, and now has come to us as Jesus the Christ, the Son, the exact imprint of God’s very being. Jesus is the one who can purify all from their sins through his death, so they can be presented blameless before God. The theology of Hebrews is very much that Jesus was both Priest and Sacrifice, ending the sacrificial system that cleansed one of sin—that system is defeated and no longer needed by God through Jesus Christ.

What sustains us? What keeps us going? Our world is full of greed and death, injustice and oppression. Sin still corrupts. In God, Elijah found encouragement and uplift, strength to go on. In Christ, we know he is the Bread of Life, and that in him we can accomplish all, because he gave himself up for us, defeating death and sin. We are called to live into this new life, knowing that sin does not have a hold on us, but we must guard against the ways of the world (as Ephesians warns). We are called to justice through love, to continue the work Christ has given us.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 34:1-3)

Bless the Lord at all times!

**We shall always sing God’s praises!**

Our joy and pride is in God;

May we come before God in humility and gladness.

Magnify God’s name with me;

**Let us exalt God’s name together!**

**Let us give thanks and praise to our God! Amen and Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we come before You knowing that we have boasted in our own work; we feel at times we deserve more than others and we look for credit and praise, instead of acknowledging privilege and power. Forgive us for our ignorance, when we have forgotten that all we have in this world is from You, and that when we have more than others, we have a responsibility to the poor and powerless. Forgive us for the times we have put down others in our arrogance. Call us into the work of justice. May we follow Your example in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself of pride and power, going to the cross instead. May we live for others as You live for us. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Taste and see that the Lord is good! In all your senses, experience God’s love through the wind in the trees, the food on your plate, the song of birds, the beauty of creation, the fragrance of flowers and sweet grass. Taste and see that the Lord is good! Know God’s love and forgiveness, and share it with others. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of the Sun, Moon and Stars—grant us light in times of shadows and mist, when the thick fog of uncertainty lingers near. Grant us light when we have difficulty finding Your way. Grant us light that warms us when we feel the coldness of rejection and despair. Grant us Your light in our hearts, that we might share the Light of the World, the Good News of Your love for all of us. Grant us Your light. Amen.