Worship Resources for August 9th, 2020—Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 37:1-4, 22-28 and Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b; 1 Kings 19:9-18 and Psalm 85:8-13; Romans 10:5-15; Matthew 14:22-33

Narrative Lectionary: Series on 2 Corinthians 8:1-15—Generosity

The first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures has followed the story of our ancestors of faith in this season after Pentecost, beginning with Abraham and Sarah. In Genesis 37:1-4, 22-28, we move into the fourth generation, the children of Jacob, and in particular, the story of Joseph. Jacob loved Joseph because he was a son born later in his life, and so he doted on him, giving him a special robe, and his brothers were jealous. When Joseph was sent to check on his brothers out in the fields, the brothers plotted against him, for Joseph had dreams about the brothers bowing down to him. Some of the brothers wanted to kill him, but Reuben, the oldest, suggested they throw him into a pit, and he planned to rescue Joseph later. But when Reuben was gone, Judah got the idea to sell Joseph so they could profit off him instead of killing him, and Joseph was sold to Ishmaelites traveling to Egypt.

Part of Psalm 105 was also the lectionary choice on July 26th. In this portion, the selection begins with the psalmist’s call to worship and praise to God for what God has done for the people, the offspring of Abraham, the children of Jacob. At verse 16, the psalmist retells what happened to Joseph, being sold into Egypt, and how Joseph helped save the rest of his family from famine. Though Joseph had been imprisoned after he was sold into slavery, he was freed by the king because the word of God was with Joseph. He became the lord of Pharaoh’s house and instructed the elders of Egypt with his wisdom.

The second selection of the Hebrew scriptures follows the prophets, and the prophet Elijah was ready to give up in 1 Kings 19:9-18. He had experienced persecution from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. He had faced down the prophets of Baal, and even though back in chapter 18 Elijah helped hide one hundred of God’s prophets, he feels he is the only one left. So after Elijah had a chance to rest, and then plead his case with God for a second time, God tells Elijah he’s about to pass by. However, God is not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but only in the sound of sheer silence. And once Elijah tells God again how he has been persecuted and is the only one left, God tells Elijah to anoint a new king over Aram, and a new king over Israel, and a new prophet to take his place. God promises that those who have not turned to Baal will live. All is not lost.

In Psalm 85:8-13, the psalmist sings of listening to what God speaks, that God speaks peace to those who are faithful. For those in awe of God, salvation is at hand. “Steadfast love and faithfulness shall meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other” (vs 10). For those who live into God’s ways, everything is drawn together, for faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness down from the sky. God brings together what is good for those who live into the ways of God.

The Epistle series on Romans continues with 10:5-15. Paul states that Moses declared that the person who does what the law requires lives by it, and that is how they live into righteousness. However, Paul speaks of a righteousness that comes by faith. Instead of learning the law, the law is in our hearts. Right-living comes by faith in Jesus. Paul believes there is no distinction between Jewish and Greek believers—God answers all who call upon God. Paul concludes this section that others cannot know to call upon God if they have not heard of God. They cannot proclaim Jesus is Lord if no one has told them.

After feeding the five thousand, Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray while the disciples went away in their boat in Matthew 14:22-33. The boat had gone far out into the sea because of the wind, so Jesus walked to the boat across the water. The disciples thought it was a ghost, but Jesus told them not to be afraid. Peter said, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus told Peter, “Come.” Peter got out of the boat, but when he noticed the wind, he became afraid, and began to sink. He cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus caught him by the hand and said, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they made it back to the boat, the wind ceased, and the disciples worshiped Jesus, believing he was the Son of God.

The Narrative Lectionary concludes its series on 2 Corinthians with the theme of Generosity in 8:1-15. Paul was concerned about the poor in Jerusalem in the church, and in both 1 Corinthians and in the letter to the Romans, he appeals to the churches for a collection to help Jerusalem believers. He uses the church in Macedonia as an example of those who gave even during trying times, and though they had extreme poverty, they found they gave in surplus. The church in Corinth fared better than many of the other early churches, but there were those in the church in Corinth who couldn’t afford enough to eat every day. Paul encourages them that even if they are struggling to give what they can afford, to give enthusiastically. Paul states it’s a matter of equality—the church in Corinth, even if they are struggling, still has more resources than the church in Jerusalem, and if they give out of what they have, they can help those who can’t give as much, and help relieve the suffering of the believers in Jerusalem.

Living by faith is easier said than done. It’s much easier for us to say we subscribe to a set of core beliefs, and much harder to live those core beliefs and values. We’ve been taught to love our neighbor, but it’s always easier to love those who are similar to us than those who are different. We’ve been taught to feed the hungry and care for the poor, but that’s easier to do so with people whose stories we know, people we think deserve it. It’s easier to test others to see if they deserve help rather than helping anyone with a need. It’s easier to make justice about punishment than it is to work for restoration. It’s easier to say we believe when everything seems calm, than it is when fear takes over. It is hard to recognize our abundance when the fear of scarcity is palpable.

Call to Worship

**Turn your hearts to God, and know God’s peace.**

**Turn your minds to God, and know God’s wisdom.**

**Turn your lives to God, and live into righteousness.**

**For the love of God is written in our hearts,**

**And we know the way God has intended for us.
Come, worship God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Faithful God, we confess that our faith sometimes wavers or falls away. We are tempted by the ways of this world, to put our trust in wealth and security. We are challenged by the injustice we experience, wondering where You are when there is so much suffering. We are tried by the struggles we have faced, of Covid-19 isolation, of racism, of state violence. There is so much that is uncertain, perhaps more than we’ve ever experienced before. Restore our hearts, O God, to place our trust in You. Renew our hope, O God, to do what we can to bring hope to others. Revive our faith, O God, to live into Your ways and know that there is resurrection, new life, in the face of despair and death. In the name of Christ, who is our living hope, our Resurrection and Life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Psalm 85:10-12a)

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The LORD will give what is good. God works all things together for good, and God is working good in you, right now. You are forgiven, loved, and restored. Go in peace and serve God. Amen.

Prayer

God of Solitude, help us to find the quiet moments, away from fear, away from worry, away from all the thoughts running through our head. Help us to find that quiet space to focus on You, physically and mentally. Open our minds to the vastness of Your wisdom. Open our hearts to the fullness of Your love. Open our lives to make space for You, to clear out the clutter of the world and to focus our hearts and minds on Your ways, Your life that You have intended for us. Come close to us, drawing us out of the noise of the world and into the quiet peace of Your presence. Amen.