Worship Resources for September 1st—Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 2:4-13 or Proverbs 25:6-7; Psalm 81:1, 10-16 or Psalm 112; Luke 14:1, 7-14; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

As we follow Jeremiah in our first thread of the Hebrew Scriptures, we hear the words of God through Jeremiah to a people who have forgotten God. They have forgotten their history, where they came from, what God did for them, and have turned to false gods. They have gone after things “that do not profit” (vs. 8, 11). By following Baal, they have turned the focus of their action to Baal instead of to the people—worship of God required a care for the poor, the widowed, the oppressed—but worship of Baal requires none of those things. They are following something that isn’t there, a false idol, to build up themselves to be wealthy and powerful and allowing the poor and oppressed to suffer, instead of remembering that it was God who delivered them out of Egypt and who has the power to deliver them again. But when they turn away from God, they turn away the hope of deliverance. They have forsaken God and God’s promises to them.

Proverbs 25:6-7 is a brief passage about humility. It is better to be raised up than to be taken down. Humility is one of the character values lifted up by Wisdom literature. In our second thread of the Hebrew Scriptures this season after Pentecost, we have been following passages about the covenant that God made with the people and the promises of the covenant. This passage, while at first glance doesn’t seem to fit, reminds us that when we are humble, we are more likely to witness and experience God’s grace firsthand than if we are proud. As often among people, we think we only need God when things are bad. If we remember with humility that all things, including ourselves, come from God, if we remember our dependence upon God, then we remember God’s presence, through good times as well as difficult times. When we are low, we hold on to the hope of God to raise us up, and when we are high, we remember with gratitude that it is God who has raised us up, and we also remember others who need help to be raised up. We focus not on our own gain, but the will of God and the care of others.

Psalm 81:1, 10-16 pairs well with the Jeremiah passage in that the psalmist sings of how the people have forgotten God’s deliverance from Egypt, that they have forgotten God is their God. God desires for us to listen, to remember, and to give thanks, but instead all too often, we turn to our own gain, and complain when things do not go our way.

Psalm 112 sings of the blessings of God for those who follow God, and that even those who are blessed with riches are blessed so they can give freely to the poor. The wicked are the ones who are angry and jealous, who allow greed to overcome them, but the righteous give freely, sharing with all, and delighting in God who has given them everything.

Luke 14:1, 7-14 contains Jesus’ teachings on humility and hospitality. You may want to include verses 15-24, the Parable of the Great Dinner, which goes along with the previous verses. Jesus is eating at the house of a leader of the Pharisees, and Jesus has noticed where everyone has sat down for the meal. The guests are choosing to sit closest to the host and to Jesus, to show how honored they are, rather than showing their humility. What Jesus advises them goes against all tradition—to sit at the lowest place and then be invited to move up. Jesus’ reasons for this is that all who humble themselves with be exalted (vs. 11), but this exaltation may not come in this lifetime. Jesus further tells them to invite those who would be on the outside, those who would be on the margins of society—the poor, the blind, the disabled. Those whose reputations and labels would not make them on the guest list. This teaching goes beyond humility, but that we are called to bless others. As Christians we often say Christ has no hands or feet but ours. We are called to bless people with our lives. It’s not just about giving money to those in need, but is about extending our lives to those on the margins. We must not just be humble ourselves, but we must empty our own selfish ambition and reach out with the love of Christ beyond society’s boundaries.

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 is the last selection from this letter this season. The writer reminds the readers that in following Jesus, we must love one another, and that love comes with respect. We must remember and love those who are in prison who have given their lives for the Gospel. We must honor our spouses and remain faithful. We must love one another with mutual respect, and not live in greed. Jesus’ teachings, the commandment to love one another, still stands. We honor God by living for others, caring for others, doing good to others. The writer makes the bold claim, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” While we all grow and change, God’s promise fulfilled through Jesus—indeed, God’s love through Jesus, remains the same.

How do we witness to God’s love in our lives? Are we willing to risk, like Jeremiah? Are we easily forgetful of what God has done and begin wondering when we will get our share, as the people did time and again? Are we living for worldly success, or will we put God’s will above our own? God’s desire for us is to love one another—do we say it, or do we live it out? If so, do we live into it with our whole lives as a witness? Jesus’ teachings on humility challenge us, and cause us to go deeper—it is not enough to humble ourselves in the presence of others, but to actively reach out and invite those who would not be invited to join in. We are called to live out our witness, especially when it is hard and goes against the grain of the world. And as it is Communion Sunday for those churches that celebrate Communion monthly, how does the invitation of Jesus challenge us at the table as we celebrate?

Call to Worship

God of Creation, Majesty and Glory

 **We come to worship You**

God of Humanity, who makes us Family

 **We come to celebrate with You**

God of Beauty, Wonder and Mystery

 **We come to praise and be in awe of You**

God of all Nations, of all Peoples, of all Places

 **We are invited, and we in turn invite each other**

 **To worship, celebrate and praise You! Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, we have become fragmented. We build up walls and hide ourselves from others. The pain of others is too much to deal with. The struggles of the world are too much to bear. We’d much rather just focus on our own lives, on our own jobs and families. But God, You have called us to be Your people, a people of the Covenant in which You are our God, not only my God. You have called us to be the people of the New Commandment, which is to love one another. We cannot go it alone. We cannot put blinders on and build up our dividers. Guide our hands to reach out across walls, our eyes to see beyond ourselves, so that we might participate in the healing of the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, who came to bring us life that we might have it abundantly, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Love knows no bounds. Hope knows no bounds. Peace knows no bounds. Faith knows no bounds. There is no place you can go where God is not there. There is nothing you can do that can separate you from God’s love. Go, bring hope and peace. Live into faith. Be love. Amen.

Prayer

Beloved Creator, as the years have passed, our hearts have opened, our minds have expanded. We no longer view the earth as flat or as the center of the universe. So we know that there is much more beyond what we can experience ourselves, and that we have only a small part to play in the great drama of life. Help us to do our part well. Guide us in Your ways of justice, of peacemaking, of caring and kindness and mercy. Keep us close to the flow, so that at the end, we will know we are still important and yet part of something far vastly beyond what we can see. In Your name we pray. Amen.