Worship Resources for September 1st, 2019—Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Series on Creeds, Acts 2:1-18, Matthew 28:17-20 or Series on Sabbath, Deuteronomy 15:1-2, 7-11, Luke 15:11-32

In this season after Pentecost, we spent the first half of the season in the stories of the rise and call of the prophets for the first selection of the Hebrew scriptures. For the remainder of this season, we will spend the first selection in Jeremiah and the Lamentations of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 2:4-13, God brings their case against the people. God brought the people out of slavery in Egypt and the wilderness into a good land, but the people have turned astray. Prophets have prophesied by Baal, priests turned away and rulers departed from what they had learned through God’s teachings. “Has a nation ever changed its gods?” God asks, because the people seem to have forgotten that their God delivered them and have thought they could save themselves.

Psalm 81 is a song for a feast day, and in this portion, the singer leads the congregation in remembering that God was the one who brought them out of Egypt, but the people turned astray. The psalmist calls the people to turn back to God, for God is the one who will rescue them and care for their needs.

Humility is the lesson in Proverbs 25:6-7. This short saying reminds the listener it is better to be invited to a greater place of honor than to assume honor and be demoted and humiliated.

Psalm 112 is a psalm of wisdom and happens to be an acrostic poem. Those who delight in God’s ways and hold the commandments will be blessed. The righteous are firm in their foundation in God, and fear will not overtake them. The righteous are the ones who give to those in need, especially the poor. The wicked will be envious, but their greed will lead nowhere.

The Epistle reading concludes its series in Hebrews with 13:1-8, 15-16. These words of encouragement for the faithful include instructions on having love for one another and to show hospitality to strangers, remarking back on the faith of Abraham and the story of his welcoming the angels who brought good news. The writer speaks of various concerns in living this life: to remain faithful to marriage vows, to be content with what one has and to beware of the love of money. The writer reminds them of the faith of their leaders as an example to look up to, and that Jesus Christ “is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” The writer encourages the faithful to speak the truth of Christ, to do good, and to share what they have, for these are the sacrifices that are pleasing to God.

Jesus liked to eat a lot. This story in Luke 14:1, 7-14, Jesus has accepted an invitation to eat at a Pharisee’s home on the sabbath, when he noticed how the guests all chose the places of honor. Jesus spoke of humility, of when they are invited to take a lower place, that way, they might be invited to move up. He further advised them not to invite friends or relatives, or those who are rich, because they’ll invite in return to repay the favor. Instead, invite those who are deemed unworthy—the poor and disabled, the beggars—because they will be unable to repay, and therefore, the one doing the inviting will be blessed. The one inviting those who have no way of repaying will be repaid at the resurrection, Jesus concluded.

The Narrative Lectionary concludes both of its late summer series, on Creeds and Sabbath.

The series on Creeds is completed with the story of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-18, and Jesus’ final words and Great Commission in Matthew 28:17-20. With Jesus’ Great Commission, the disciples are sent out into the world to make disciples, to baptize, and to do the work of the Holy Spirit. They are reminded that Christ is always with them. In the story of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, and Peter boldly proclaimed to all that had gathered for the festival that the Holy Spirit, as prophesied through the prophet Joel, was at work. God was doing something new out of something very old.

The series on Sabbath finishes with the concept of the sabbatical year in Deuteronomy 15:1-2, 7-11—a year of sabbath after six years. God calls upon the people to forgive debts, to give willingly to their neighbor in need, and if their neighbors are Hebrew slaves sold to them, they are to free them in the seventh year. The Gospel passage is the parable of the Forgiving Father or Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32, and though the younger son had squandered everything, the father forgave him. The other son was indignant, but the father tells him they had to welcome home the son that was lost, who was dead, and is now alive and found.

The scriptures teach us about humility and encouragement, because nothing we do is on our own. Nothing we have gained comes from our work alone. We need one another, and ultimately we need our Creator, who has given us the whole earth. We help each other. No one pulls themselves up by their bootstraps; God is the one who provides and aids us, and we are called to provide and help one another, especially those in need among us. Jesus warns against those who would proudly assume positions of power, for humiliation will be their undoing. Instead, we are called to encourage and build up one another, to be kind, and to help each other.

Call to Worship:

We gather to pray and to praise, to lift our hearts to God;

 **We gather for rest, renewal, and reassurance for our daily lives.**

We gather with one another to share God’s love, to pray for each other,

 **And to build up one another in Christ.**

We gather to worship, to be lifted up, and to be encouraged;

 **True worship is the giving of our lives to God by loving one another.**

Come, join your hearts in worship,

 **And follow Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for us.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, Creator of us All, Maker of the Universe, we confess that we have a problem with humility. As a people we like to puff out our chest. For those of us in the dominant culture, we like to believe that we have everything because we worked hard and deserve it, and we buy into the myth that others simply didn’t work hard enough, instead of understanding the sins of colonialism, white privilege, and power. Forgive us. Knock us off our high horse, but gently. Remind us that You are the one who made us, who made this entire earth for all people, but there are millions who are hungry, experiencing homelessness, poverty, disease, and death. Forgive us for the hoarding of resources, for the acquiescence of power and wealth to a very few, and for believing the myth that it’s not our problem. Call us into accountability. Call us into the ways of sustainable living. Keep us on the path of justice and move us to speak out and to work with those on the margins. Guide us into Your ways of humility, gentleness, and caring for all. For it is in the name of Jesus Christ, who emptied himself and became one of us, serving the lost and the least, that we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Follow God’s Wisdom, and you will find the way of God. Follow the teachings of Christ, and you will find your way to your neighbors that love you and whom you love. Follow the Holy Spirit, and you will be opened to new ways of peace, love, and joy. Repent, turn back to God, and know that God is with you. You are forgiven of your sins. You are loved. You belong to Christ. Amen.

Prayer

God who separated the waters, who called forth Light—You are the same one who made us in Your image, and the same one who came to us as Christ. You are the same one who brings stars to birth and washes the disciples’ feet. You are the same one whose Spirit formed the planets from a formless void of universe, and breathes the Spirit into us. You are the same one who brought forth life on this planet and call us to serve the last of all and least of all. You are the One God, the Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth and All Things, and You have loved us as one of us. May we understand Your love with great humility and thanksgiving, and do our part to belong to Your beloved community here on earth as it is in eternity. Amen.