Worship Resources for September 10, 2017—Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 12:1-14 and Psalm 149; Ezekiel 33:7-11 and Psalm 119:33-40; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

Narrative Lectionary: Creation by the Word, Genesis 1:1-2:4a (John 1:1-5)

God tells Moses and Aaron to mark the event of the Exodus with the institution of the Passover Meal. The Israelites were to use the blood of the lamb to mark their doors, so God would pass over their homes as God struck the firstborn of every Egyptian. When this plague occurred, Pharaoh would finally let the people go, and they must be ready to leave in a hurry. This is a day of remembrance for the people, to remember what God had done for them, the lengths God went to for the people to escape slavery into freedom. It is also a day to remember that others suffered because of Pharaoh’s actions, and the grief of all who lost beloved children that day.

Psalm 149 is a song praising God who executes judgment in battle. God is the one who binds the kings so they cannot harm the people. God has given the people victory, and they rejoice by praising God, for God is their king. The glory for all those who are faithful is their victory.

God does not take pleasure when the wicked meet their end in Ezekiel 33:7-11, but rather what they view as punishment is a consequence of their own actions. God warns the prophet Ezekiel that he is to speak the warnings God is giving him to the people. If he doesn’t, what happens to them is on his hands—he will be responsible for not delivering the message. However, if he does speak on behalf of God and the people don’t listen, they will bear the consequences of their own actions (or inaction). God desires for people to repent, to turn back—not to suffer punishment from the consequences of their actions. God desires repentance and restoration.

The psalmist longs for God’s teachings in Psalm 119:33-40. The psalmist seeks God for understanding, desiring to know the ordinances, statutes and commandments so that they may stay in God’s ways. They know that the path to life is found by living into God’s ways.

In Romans 13:8-14, Paul declares that all the law can be summed up in what Jesus said: love your neighbor as yourself. Love fulfills the law. Paul declares that salvation is near—the night is gone, the day is coming, and the faithful ought to live as children of the day. Paul teaches that we ought to live by example—by loving our neighbors as ourselves, and by acting in accordance with that love in how we treat others and how we are perceived by others in our actions.

Matthew 18:15-20 is often seen as a formula of how disputes ought to be settled. However, sometimes this is lifted out of context as a way to silence people who are speaking out. We need to be careful not to silence the victims of violence, who are unable to go to their assailant one-on-one. We need to take this call seriously, but not literally, in how we resolve disputes. In context, Jesus is talking about stumbling blocks, reconciliation, and forgiveness. As much as possible, we ought to seek reconciliation and forgiveness. But there are times when this is not possible. Victims of violence should never be forced to face their assailant. But when it is possible, in disputes that do not involve violence, we need to take Jesus’ words seriously for how we approach conflict, and deal with it directly, and minimize the effects to the community as much as possible, to seek reconciliation and peace. Sometimes, we are too concerned with being right than we are with bringing healing. At other times, we are too concerned with keeping the “peace” that we cause victims to continue to be victimized.

The Narrative Lectionary begins a new cycle this Sunday, with secondary readings this fall from John’s Gospel account. We begin in the beginning, with the Word spoken into Creation. God speaks, and Creation occurs. God says, “Let there be light.” God doesn’t command, but rather gives consent, encourages, gives permission for light to be, gives permission and encourages all of creation to come forth. As God hovers over the waters of the deep, creation is waiting to burst forth, and God gives their consent for Creation to come into being. What has come into being is life! John 1:1-5 echoes this consent, of the Word being in the beginning, the word being life, and the light of all the people. The Word is what brings creation into being.

Is your image of God domineering and wrathful, ready to dole out punishment? Or is your image of God one of blessing and encouragement? God doesn’t seek punishment, but rather seeks repentance and reconciliation. God gives all of creation consent to be. God has consented to allow us to make our own choices, and has sent us prophets to help speak the will of God so we may hear it, but we still make our own choices to harm others, to seek our own desires above the needs of others. Pharaoh refused to give consent to let the people go, and the consequences of his actions caused many to suffer. When we refuse to seek reconciliation because we want to be right rather than reconciled, we cause others, including the community, and including ourselves, to suffer. Rather, we would do well to remember that love does not wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law (Romans 13:10), and that love does not allow harm to come to others. Rather, in love, we give consent, we encourage, and we bless, as God has done for us.

Call to Worship (from Romans 13:8-10, 13, and 1 John 4:7)

Owe no one anything, except to love one another,

**For love is the fulfillment of the law.**

All the commandments are summed up by loving your neighbor as yourself,

**For love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Let us live with honor, not in quarreling or jealousy,

**For love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Beloved, let us love one another,

**For love is the fulfillment of the law.**

Come, join our hearts in worship,

**Come, let us worship Christ, who is Love.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Love, we confess that we have loved conditionally. We have kept people who live on the street at arm’s length, as if being poor is obscene. We have kept those who come from other cultures and speak different languages at a distance, as if being different is wrong. We have kept out folks with disabilities, as if disability is infectious. Forgive us for not loving our neighbor as ourselves. Forgive us for not fulfilling the law by loving others. Call us into Your ways of love, that breaks down barriers. Call us into Your ways of love, that open us to heartbreak and a desire to change the world. Call us into Your ways of love, that open us to people, to their experiences, their lives, their differences. Call us into Your ways of love that remind us we are all human beings, created in Your image. In the name of Christ, who is Love, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God leads us to the still waters. God leads us through the valley of the shadow. God leads us through the rough places and makes them plain. God is with us. Know that God is still present with you. Know that God is always present with you. Repent, turn back to God’s ways, and know that God has been there, all along, and will continue with you on this journey of faith. Amen.

Prayer

Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing! Tune thy heart to sing Thy grace. We sing out to You, in our very breath. We sing out to You, remembering that You are the giver of all good gifts. We sing out to You, the Fount of all our Blessings, remembering that long ago, over the great deep, You spoke a word. You said, “Let,” and gave Your consent for all of creation to burst forth, the great chorus that we continue to participate in. Prone to wander, Lord, we feel it, Prone to leave You that we love. Here is our heart, O take and seal it, seal it for They courts above. We sing our desire to be part of You, to belong to You, and are glad for Your consent to be part of Your beloved community chorus on earth, as it is in heaven. Call us into this great song together. Amen.