Worship Resources for September 11th, 2016—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

This is also the fifteenth anniversary of September 11th, 2001

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28 or Exodus 32:7-14; Psalm 14 or Psalm 51:1-10; 1 Timothy 1:12-17; Luke 15:1-10

Narrative Lectionary: Creation and Fall, Genesis 2:4b-7, 15-17; 3:1-8 (Luke 11:4)

The prophet Jeremiah declares destruction will fall upon the people and the land they live in, because they have turned away from the ways of God. The people have followed the ways of evil, so God will not relent or let up. The consequences of their actions will bring destruction to the world that they know.

God changes their mind in Exodus 32:7-14, when the people made a golden calf to worship while Moses is away. God tells Moses to get out of the way; God is going to destroy the people and make a new nation from Moses. However, Moses intervenes on behalf of the people, but also because Moses does not want the world to turn away from God. God changes their mind, and does not bring destruction to the people.

The psalmist sings of the foolishness of people in Psalm 14, especially those leaders who say there is no God, and those who live as if there is no God. They are corrupt, and trample on the poor, and lead others astray. But God is with the righteous, and restores the fortunes of the poor, and will deliver the people.

Psalm 51:1-10 is often attributed to David and is a confessional prayer. The psalmist confesses their sin to God and asks God to cleanse them of their sin. God desires truth, and so the psalmist asks for God to enter in and teach wisdom, and to renew their spirit with righteousness.

In the introduction to 1 Timothy, the writer (most scholars do not believe Paul wrote this letter) offers gratitude and praise to Christ Jesus because God has granted him mercy and a chance to serve again, even though in his former life he persecuted Christians and was “a man of violence.” The writer has been given a second chance, and he is grateful for the opportunity to be an example of Christ’s grace and mercy.

Jesus tells the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin in response to the Pharisees and scribes that were grumbling about who Jesus welcomed to the table. Both of these parables are stories of ridiculous, extravagant displays of love and celebration (and lead up to the Parable of the Prodigal Son/Forgiving Father). No good shepherd would leave 99 sheep behind to find one lost one. No woman would spend all night sweeping to find one lost coin when she had 9 others. And neither would have such a ridiculous, extravagant celebration afterwards to celebrate finding what was lost—but they do, because God does over each one of us when we return to God’s ways and work for the reign of God on earth. God is ridiculously extravagant with each of us, but we often do not recognize it, and we often do not show the same sort of joy and celebration in welcoming others who are different from us, who are on the margins or outskirts of society.

The Narrative Lectionary Year 3 Series theme is of promises and covenant, and it begins with Genesis, the story of the creation of humanity, and the commandment by God to not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The story of the serpent in chapter 3 (which scholars have linked to the serpent in the Epic of Gilgamesh—a myth familiar to those in ancient Mesopotamia) is the story of humanity listening to a voice other than God’s, and the fall of humanity is failing to trust and listen to God.

The Narrative Lectionary focused on Luke 11:2-4 for the past few weeks; verse 4 asks for forgiveness and to not be led into the time of trial, the time of temptation, as the first human beings were in the garden, and to trust in God.

“Cease to do evil; learn to do good.” The prophet Isaiah speaks these words in the very first chapter, and indeed, this is the call from God since Genesis 3—turn away from the ways of evil, the ways of selfishness and self-satisfaction, and instead, to follow the ways of God that include justice for the oppressed. The psalmist called out the leaders who had turned away from God, thinking there was no God to judge them and they were satisfied in their own ways. Even Jesus’ parables were in response to leaders who were smug in their ways and thinking they were doing the right thing—and they were leaving out the marginalized and beloved children of God. God continues to call us away from the way of the world and into God’s ways of love, justice, and mercy.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 1:16-17; Micah 6:8)

Cease to do evil,

**Learn to do good;**

Seek justice,

**Rescue the oppressed,**

Defend the orphan,

**Plead for the widow,**

Turn away from the evil of this world;

**Seek justice, practice loving-kindness, and walk humbly with our God.**

Come, enter this time of worship.

**We are ready to change our lives for God, ready to serve the world for Christ.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, we have plundered the earth and taken what we want, rather than caring for the earth You have given us. We have taken advantage of others and used people instead of caring for others the way You have cared for us. We have forgotten our kindred in the world, especially those living on the streets, those who are refugees, those who are escaping violence, even though You have never forgotten us. Forgive us for not living into who You created us to be. Forgive us for failing to live up to Your intention for us. Forgive us, most of all, for neglecting Your image in us, and in one another, by failing to be responsible for the well-being of others and the world. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Our God is a God of renewal. Every year, every season, every day, every moment is a chance for renewal. There is always a time to turn back to God, to remember God’s intention for your life, and to do the right thing. You are forgiven, renewed, and restored; now live into God’s ways of love, justice, and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Holy God, we remember this day, fifteen years ago, and still cry out in lament for the thousands of lives lost on this day in acts of terror. We cry out in lament for losing the world we thought we had, and being thrust into the reality that violence can strike us at any time. We cry out because violence is still done in Your name, whether it be the striking of planes into buildings, or the refusal to help a refugee child. We are a people who worship the culture of violence. We value violence over life, revenge over justice, retaliation over forgiveness.

You are the Christ, the One who died on the cross because of the violence, the sin of the world. You are the one who took on our violence, and instead of retaliation, You came to us and said, “Peace be with you.” Instead of the fear of terror, You came to us and said, “Do not be afraid.” Instead of calling us to take up weapons and attack, You called us to put down our sword, and instead, “Love thy neighbor.”

On this day, may we remember those lives who were lost. May we remember the lives that have been lost in war, in acts of terrorism, and in acts of retaliation in the name of peace to this day. Our violence has not stopped. The sins of the world continue. But we can change. Spirit of Life, breathe new life into us. Call us into the ways of peace and restorative justice. Help us to seek reconciliation with our Muslim kindred, and all peoples of faith and ideals around the world. Help us to build bridges instead of walls. Remind us of our common humanity, created in Your image, created to care for the world and one another. Remind us of Your creative intention in each of us, and to seek it in others. In the name of Jesus the Christ, who continues to show us the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we pray. Amen.