Worship Resources for September 13th—Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Proverbs 1:20-33 or Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 19 or Psalm 116:1-9; James 3:1-12; Mark 8:27-38

Narrative Lectionary: Garden of Eden, Genesis 2:4b-25 (Mark 1:16-20 or Mark 10:6-8)

Wisdom is often personified as a woman throughout the book of Proverbs. Here, she cries out to those who continue to ignore her, who continue to follow their own desires and the seductions of the world, rather than her insight that comes from God. Those who listen to Wisdom will avoid self-destruction, and choose the righteous life. Those who fail to do so, who fail to be in awe of God, who dismiss God’s will and desire for their life will find nothing but destruction and calamity, and have no hope—and when they cry out for Wisdom’s help, it will be too late.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of being called to be a teacher by God, who “awakens” his ear every morning, but the students have failed to listen. They have mocked him and despised him for speaking the truth, but Isaiah will not fail God. Isaiah knows in the end he stands before the judge, and God will vindicate him. The prophet calls for others to stand firm and trust in God.

Psalm 19 declares that God speaks wisdom into creation, and that the rising of the sun is like the calling of God’s voice, the declaration of a bridegroom running out of his tent. From dawn to dusk, creation declares the goodness of God. Following God’s ways, being in awe of God, learning the ways of God’s Wisdom—this is the life God intends for us, and the life the psalmist pursues. The psalmist ends with a simple prayer that God would accept their words, prayers and meditations.

Psalm 116:1-9 sings of thanksgiving to God for rescue and deliverance. The psalmist praises God who has delivered them from capture and death, and returned them to the “land of the living.”

James 3:1-12 declares the danger of not thinking before we speak. James is a continuation of Wisdom literature in the New Testament, and reminds us that we are known by what we say, more even than what we do. We bless and curse from the same mouth. We gossip and slander as well as praise from the same tongue. But if we allow terrible things to come forth, is the good not tainted?

Mark 8:27-38 contains a story in which Peter does not think before he speaks. At first, when asked by Jesus “Who do you say that I am?” Peter is the first to declare that Jesus is the Messiah. In the next breath, however, he is pulling Jesus aside to rebuke him for talking about what must happen to the Son of Man. Jesus tells them that the Messiah will be killed, and in three days rise again, but Peter can’t get past the first part. He starts to tell Jesus to knock it off. In turn, Jesus tells Peter “Get behind me Satan.” Peter, who first praised and declared Jesus the Messiah, is now the stumbling block for the Messiah, trying to stop him from doing what he came to do. Of course Peter doesn’t understand this—but Peter is often talking before understanding (foreshadowing that he will declare he will never deny Jesus, but less than a day later, denies that he ever knew him). Jesus reminds them that in following him they must deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow him.

The Narrative Lectionary moves back to the stories in the Hebrew Scriptures, beginning with the second story of Creation found in Genesis 2: the Garden of Eden. While the first chapter of Genesis focuses on the whole world as being created by God, with human beings created last, this story focuses on God’s act of creation being a garden, creating a human being (sometimes called “man,” but a more accurate translation would be “human being” without gender). God notices that the human being is alone and desires to create a helper and partner, but none of the creatures that God creates afterwards, who are all given names by the human being, are suitable to be a partner. So God puts the human being to sleep, takes a rib, and forms another human being that is called a woman. Unlike the first story, in which God has created human beings at the same time, both male and female, in this story, there is one being, and then the two are created from the one. Also unlike the first chapter, this chapter has been used to instill gender norms and patriarchal hierarchy, though it appears in this story, the two were considered equals in the garden.

There are two optional selections from Mark: the first is the calling of the first disciples from their fishing boats. Jesus is calling them to do something new, to leave behind their nets, to follow him and fish for people. Simon and Andrew do so, and even James and John—they leave their father behind in the boat along with the hired hands to follow Jesus. In pairing with the creation story, God is still creating something new in us, if we can hear the call of God, naming us to something new.

The second option is Mark 10:6-8, which is in the middle of Jesus’ teaching about divorce. Jesus argues against the Pharisees that have come to him in this moment, asking him about divorce, whether it is lawful or not. Jesus argues that the law isn’t the problem, it is whether it is right. We must remember that in Jesus’ day men (sometimes women in the Greek society) initiated divorce, and all it took was a man throwing his wife out of his house in public and saying “I divorce you” three times. Women who were not married and could not go back to their father’s home (those that did were seen as scorned and shameful) often ended up on the streets. Jesus uses Genesis 2 as God’s intention, that the two would become one—partners, equals. But just as the culture of Jesus’ day has changed, so has our understanding of marriage, commitment, gender and sexuality, and all must be considered when discerning this text.

What is God’s intention for us? Wisdom calls us to discern God’s ways and not our own. Wisdom calls us away from the ways of the world that would seek our own pleasure and satisfaction over and above the needs of those around us. Wisdom calls us to do good, to live right, to follow God’s teachings, to remember that the same God who created the heavens and the earth still calls us to right living, but we often ignore the call of God. We often listen to the voices of the world above the voice of God. We know that Jesus has called us into a counter-cultural way of being community, but we still sit with the people we like and do things in the groups that make us comfortable and affirm our worldly ways. Can we listen for the voice of God calling us to follow God’s ways? Can we do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God?

Call to Worship

Be in awe of God, and you will find wisdom, knowledge and insight;

**We gather to worship God, who made the entire universe.**

Turn to Jesus, who gives us guidance, hope, and assurance;

**Follow God, who knows our inmost thoughts and dreams;**

Seek God’s ways for your life, and not the ways of the world;

**For God’s ways are justice, mercy, and love.**

**Come, let us worship God, who leads us into life. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Architect of the Universe, we confess that we forget You. We have forgotten that You are always present. We have forgotten that You have taught us how to live and have called us to love. We have forgotten Your ways. We have made gods in our own image, idols of fame and wealth and notoriety. We have pursued the ways of the world to seek our own gain and ignored the needs of others. We have shrugged off calls to change our ways by pointing out the faults in others. Forgive us. May we recognize You are the Creator of All, and that You have called us to a different way. Most of all, may we be humbled because of the love of Jesus, who gave himself up for us, so that we would give of ourselves to others that they might live. In the name of Jesus, who humbled himself to the point of death on the cross, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Hear the call of Wisdom. She is calling you to recognize that God is still here. She is calling you to recognize your neighbor in need. She is calling you to recognize all the blessings and abundance in your life that God desires for you to use for the good of all, especially to build the beloved community. Hear the call of Wisdom. She is calling out at the street corners. She is calling out on the school bus. She is calling out at the water cooler. She is calling out on Capitol Hill. She is calling you. Turn, listen, and walk in her ways, knowing you are beloved by God, and still a student of Jesus the Rabbi. Amen.

Prayer

Teaching God, teach us Your ways. May we learn the lessons of old: that You created the world and us and Your intention for us is to help bring forth life, to cultivate the world to grow. Stop us from destroying your creation. Halt us from causing destruction. Call on us to end oppression and injustice. Help us to free the imprisoned, to lift up the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim the Good News of Your love. Call us back into Your intention, to bring forth life, and help us bring forth the New Life of Your promise in the beloved community. In Jesus’ name. Amen.