Worship Resources for September 15th, 2019—Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Isaac Born to Sarah, Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7 (Mark 10:27)

The first selection of the Hebrew scriptures continues with the prophet Jeremiah in 4:11-12, 22-28. Jeremiah beholds a vision of the land in desolation, for a people that did not turn back to God and have turned to evil ways. God has come, not to warn them, not to cleanse the wicked from among them, because all have turned away and forgotten God. Instead, this is the consequences of their actions—a land wiped bare, even of creation. The earth shall mourn. But even then, God promises they will not make a full end. It is a small glimpse of hope in the midst of the utter ruin of everything: God is still the Creator.

The psalmist sings of foolish people who say there is no God in Psalm 14. God is the refuge of the poor, and even those who would plunder and devour must heed to God. God will restore the fortunes of the oppressed and will deliver the people in need.

In the second selection, Moses intercedes on behalf of the people in Exodus 32:7-14, a people who have already abandoned God and made an idol out of gold. The people that God brought out of Egypt, in just a short amount of time, have demanded a new god, and Moses’ brother Aaron molded a golden calf out of the gold of the people. God tells Moses to leave God alone, for God will destroy the people and make a new nation from Moses. But Moses intercedes, reminding God of their ancestors, the covenant God made with them. Moses further reminds God that other peoples are watching. What would the Egyptians think? That God delivered a people from slavery, from the Egyptians, only to destroy them in the wilderness? God changes their mind, and God does not destroy the people.

Psalm 51:1-10 is sometimes attributed to David. It is a plea to God for forgiveness from their sins, for the psalmist acknowledges they have gone wrong. They are laying it bare before God, knowing that God knows all, and there is nothing that can be hidden. The psalmist wants to be cleansed from their sins, to have a new heart and right spirit.

The Epistle reading begins a series in 1 Timothy, one of the pastoral letters, that may or may not have been authored by Paul. In 1:12-17, Paul lays out who he used to be—a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. He confesses it freely, believing that in Christ Jesus he has been set free from his sins and guilt. Now, Paul is an example, proclaiming the Gospel, so that others might believe and have eternal life.

Jesus tells two parables in Luke 15:1-10, after some religious leaders grumble about the people Jesus was hanging out with, including tax collectors and sinners. Jesus asks them a rhetorical question—wouldn’t you go after one lost sheep if you had ninety-nine who were safe? The truth is, no one would. It would be expected to lose a sheep along the way. But God doesn’t work the way we do. God is extravagant with God’s love and forgiveness. God is somewhat ridiculous about rejoicing over each of us. In the same manner, Jesus tells a story of a woman who has ten coins and loses one. And even though a woman might sweep her entire house until she found it, most likely she wouldn’t go out and tell her neighbors and celebrate, because that would seem foolish. But God is foolish with love. These two parables lead up to the parable of the Prodigal Son and the Forgiving Father in the following verses.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the birth of Isaac born to Sarah. In Genesis 18:1-15, Abraham, standing at the entrance to his tent near the oaks of Mamre, in the heat of the day, notices three strangers. Abraham implores them to come stay, and he offers them some food and respite. He tells Sarah to bake cakes while he has a calf killed and prepared, and brings the strangers a hearty meal. The strangers ask where his wife Sarah is, and Abraham tells them she’s in the tent. One of the strangers declares they will return in due season, and Sarah will bear a son. But Sarah overhears this and laughs. How can she be a mother in her old age? God asks why Sarah laughed, because is there anything too wonderful for God? Though Sarah denies that she laughed, she does indeed become pregnant, has a son, and names him Isaac which means “laughter,” for God has brought laughter to her. The joke, it seems, was on her.

In the complementary Gospel passage, Jesus declares that for mortals things are impossible, but with God, all things are possible, in Mark 10:27.

God is a God of extravagant, overflowing, even foolish love. We are a people who sometimes don’t seem to know what we are doing or where we are heading. We are a people given the entire earth and in a short amount of time have polluted it and started the course of destruction. We’ve been short-sighted, focused on upholding the systems of this world even when they harm us, because we can’t see outside of them. God still loves us, even though we sin against others, and we participate in the systemic sin of the world. God still loves us, offers us forgiveness, and the hope of new life now, eternal life to come. And God is still calling us away from evil, to do good, and to love one another and care for creation.

Call to Worship

The promises of the world are fleeting,

 **But the promises of God are eternal.**

Worldly measures of success, wealth, and power tempt us;

 **The commandments of Christ lead us into new life.**

Though we are swayed by the ways of the world, God calls our name.

 **Jesus says, “Come to me, and I will give you rest.”**

Enter this time of worship, leaving behind the desires of this world;

 **May our desire be for God, and to love one another. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that we never seem to have enough. We want to resist the ways of this world, but we also want to live. We want to provide for our loved ones and make sure our needs are met. The line between our needs and our wants is thin and blurred. Holy One, help us to redirect our focus and desire to You. Call us away from the temptations of worldly comfort, knowing that we cannot rest until there is true justice for all. Keep us on the path of right-living, knowing that we must care for one another’s needs in order to care for our own. Hold us to Your all-encompassing love, knowing that in Your love and grace we find rest and healing, something the world cannot provide. Holy One, keep us to Your way, Your truth, and Your life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Our God is the one who would leave ninety-nine others to find you. Our God is the one who would search everywhere for you and then rejoice when you are found. Our God is the one who, despite everything you have done, all that you have squandered away, all that you have forgotten and lost, all that you have destroyed—is right there, still with you, and is loving you into repentance and transformation. Know that God is with you, loving you in only the way God can, and you are forgiven and restored. God has changed you permanently because of God’s love. You are not the same—you are forever loved by God. Go share the good news and rejoice that you are found. Amen.

Prayer

Love of Love, Peace of Peace, may You fill us, mold us and shape us, for new life now and for eternity. Reshape our hearts to be full of love for our neighbor, especially those on the margins, those who face oppression, those who have fallen, those who have been forgotten. Reshape our lives to be open to living for others instead of ourselves, to reject selfishness and worldly gain. Reshape our lives to be free of violence and to embrace Your ways of justice and peace. Love of Love, Peace of Peace, may Your love free us in this world to be a people of peace. Amen.