Worship Resources for September 16, 2018—Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Call of Abraham, Genesis 12:1-9 (Matthew 28:19-20)

Our first selection in the Hebrew Scriptures follows the theme of Wisdom Literature, with Proverbs 1:20-33. Echoing Proverbs 9 (a selection in the lectionary a few weeks ago), Wisdom is personified in the feminine, calling out at the corner and the gates, the streets and the city square for people to turn away from the world’s folly. For those who did not choose to be in awe of God, they have chosen their own path, and Wisdom laughs at them. She knows they will cry out and regret what they have done, but they have thrown away knowledge and wisdom, and will find it no more.

Psalm 19 sings of the heavens declaring the glory of God. Knowledge is spouted by creation itself, even without words—everything God has made tells of God’s wonder. All the laws and ordinances guide people to the fear, or awe, of God, who made all things. However, at times the people have fallen astray. The psalmist asks God to cleanse them of hidden faults, to be able to stand before God, their words and meditations accepted as this hymn of praise.

One of the Suffering Servant passages in Isaiah, this second selection of the Hebrew Scriptures speaks of an active, nonviolent resistance on behalf of the people during their exile, knowing that God is the one who brings vindication. God is the one who stands with the people, and what they have suffered is not their fault—they cannot be found guilty. God is the one who is with them, always.

Psalm 116:1-9 is a song of praise to God for healing and deliverance from death. The psalmist believed they were on the edge of death, and God has rescued them. The psalmist is relieved, and praises God who protects and delivers us from death.

The Epistle reading continues with the letter of James. In 3:1-12, the writer continues the Wisdom tradition in the Christian scriptures, focusing in these verses on the words we say. The tongue is like the rudder on a ship—it directs where we go and what we do. The writer of James is concerned overall with people who give lip service to faith but do not live it out. However, even more harm can come when we don’t care about what we say, when we use our words to harm others, when we curse others. One cannot take back what they have said. Clean water cannot come from a spring full of brackish water, among the many illustrations the writer uses, and the same with good, kind speech—it can’t follow from a place where evil and foulness have spouted from.

The Gospel Lesson shares the great question Jesus asked the disciples in Mark 8:27-38, “Who do you say that I am?” The disciples tell Jesus what everyone is saying about him, but Peter declares, “You are the Messiah.” But in the next moment, Peter is rebuking Jesus for speaking about his betrayal, suffering and death. Jesus rebukes back, “Get behind me Satan!” For Peter, and many others, were setting their minds on human things and not on the divine. Peter declared Jesus was the Messiah but didn’t understand who the Messiah really was. Jesus further declares that those who wish to follow him must deny themselves, take up the cross, and follow him. They must put to death the things of this world, and their words must match their actions. Those who are ashamed of Jesus and his words, Jesus will be ashamed of them when he comes in glory.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on stories of God’s covenant and deliverance. In Genesis 12:1-9, God calls Abram and Sarai (not yet known as Abraham and Sarah) to leave the land of his father and their family, and to go instead to a new land, where God will make a great nation. Abram and Sarai travel with their nephew Lot, and they travel from Haran to the land of Canaan, and God promises Abram that this land will belong to Abram’s descendants. Abram builds an altar at Shechem, since God appeared to him, and as they continue to travel to Canaan, Abram builds altars to this God who continues to be present with them.

In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus calls the disciples to go out to every nation, and to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and to remember that he is with them always, to the end of the age. Paired with the Genesis 12 passage, once again God is calling those who have been chosen to go forth, and to know that God is with them always.

God has made us holy and wholly, calling us to seek wisdom and knowledge. Every part of us is who we are, and it is a gift from God. All too often, we follow the ways of the world, seeking our own gain, satisfying our own desires. Our words become sharp and divisive, causing harm, even when we didn’t intend it. And that’s the point: when our intentions aren’t good from the beginning, from within, whatever comes out of us is foul. We say the wrong thing and then stumble over our apologies, insisting that wasn’t what we meant. God is calling us to a different way, of living inside out. God is calling us into a journey of wholeness, of well-being that is holy, and leading us forward to new insights. Jesus is calling us to deny ourselves, to deny our worldly desires and to take up the cross and follow him. The Spirit is moving in us and among us, reminding us that we are never alone on this journey of faith and self-discovery.

Call to Worship

God called our ancestors long ago to a new land, a new way of life;

 **God is calling us into a journey of faith.**

Jesus called the disciples to carry their cross and to follow Him;

 **Jesus is calling us into the fullness of life, to live into God’s intention.**

The Spirit called the early church to live deeply into the life of God;

 **The Spirit is calling us to share our gifts for the glory of God.**

Come, join in this journey of faith; live deeply into this life God has given you,

 **And love one another as Christ has loved us. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Calling God, Your voice is still calling out to us, pleading with us to seek the ways of Wisdom, but we continue to be distracted by the ways of the world. We choose the easy path of worldly satisfaction instead of the hard road of faith. We choose the simple pleasures over the work of justice. We choose ourselves over the needs of others. Forgive us, and call to us again. Remind us of who we are: created in You for good works, that You prepared beforehand to be our way of life. Call us back to Your created intention for us: to live out our lives, fully and wholly, for You, by loving our neighbors as ourselves. In the name of Christ, who laid down his life for us, and lives again, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Our Creator knows us, knows every hair on our head. God knows we aren’t perfect, but God made us to learn from our imperfections. God trusts that you have the strength and courage to grow, to learn, and to become a better person. So apologize and learn, grow and change, and live out God’s intention in your life. Know that you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Living God, You gave birth to the universe, to the world, through Your voice that called into the deep. You are midwifing us into this new life, where we live for others instead of ourselves, into a new, deeper love. We have grown from a creature struggling to survive the elements, into beings struggling to know who we are and ought to be. In our heart of hearts, You are there, whispering to us to be born anew, to understand who You are in the world and in our lives. You call to us to move away from simple understandings into a view of the universe still growing and expanding. Birth us into this new way of life, this new way of being. In the name of Christ, who was born through death, and in whom we have new life now that endures forever, Amen.