Worship Resources for September 18th, 2016—Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 or Amos 8:4-7; Psalm 79:1-9 or Psalm 113; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

Narrative Lectionary: God’s Promise to Abraham, Genesis 15:1-6 (Luke 3:8)

The prophet Jeremiah weeps for the people who are poor, who have experienced the neglect and abuse of the wealthy elite, who have turned to worship of other gods. God feels the pain that the poor are experiencing, and God has called upon the leaders to care for the poor, but they continue to neglect them, continue to leave them to suffer and struggle.

Echoing Jeremiah, the passage from Amos speaking of ignoring God’s ways, and ignoring the poor so that the wealthy can gain more wealth. The wealthy elite are ignoring the needs of the poor and don’t care about really worshiping God, they want to look good in front of others, even though they are often cheating the poor to keep more money for themselves. But God will not forget or overlook what they have done to the poor.

Psalm 79:1-9 was written during a time of occupation and exile, when the people of Israel saw their temple used for the worship of other gods. The practices of Israel were ignored and the temple was defiled by others. The psalmist claims that what has happened is a result of the people of Israel’s own turning away from God, and the psalmist pleads with God for forgiveness and deliverance.

Psalm 113 sings praise to God who is above all nations, who lifts up the poor and makes them equal to rulers with wealth and power. God is on the side of the poor, the needy, the downcast—and God fulfills the needs of all.

The writer of 1 Timothy 2:1-7 prays for, and urges others to pray for the leaders of nations, that they might live in peace and seek God’s wisdom, and that there is one God who is above all, for both Jews and Gentiles. For God desires everyone to come to the knowledge of truth and to be saved.

Luke 16:1-13 is the parable of the shrewd manager, who makes deals with others to help save himself. This manager has been brought up on charges that he has squandered property, but he makes allies of all the others who are indebted to his master, and the master commended him. The point of the parable is that one cannot serve God and wealth, and that we ought to use the resources we have in this world to help others and to make friends. Because what we have is not our own, all belongs to God. And if we see it in that light, that we are caring for God’s resources, we will not be swayed by the power of wealth.

The Narrative Lectionary is of God’s Promise to Abraham. Before God has renamed him, Abram has followed God along with his wife Sarai away from their family to a new land, and they have been unable to have children. And Abram is upset because he has no heir, no one to pass on what he has, and it will die with him and go on to the child of one of his slaves. But God promises Abram if he can’t count the stars, he won’t be able to count his descendants. And Abram believed God. This trust is beyond the normal trust between two people—Abram has put his whole life, and life after death (in the form of inheritance and the continuation of the family) into God’s hands.

Luke 3:8 is John the Baptist’s warning to those who claim that they are accepted by God because they are children of Abraham. Instead, John warns them to bear fruit that shows they are worthy of repentance, that shows they indeed understand that this is the same God of their ancestors, because the descendants of Abraham are as numerous as the stars. What God desires now is not lineage but the change of heart.

Throughout the prophets, the message is clear: if you serve God, you must help those in need around you and look after their well-being. If you don’t care for the poor, the widow, and the orphan, you don’t follow God’s ways. And when the leaders in the days of the prophets turned away from God, they also turned their backs on the poor. They did not help others because their new gods required lavish acts of devotion. When some tried to claim they were faithful to God, it was clear to the prophets that it was in name only, and in the end, Amos calls upon the removal of the festivals to let justice roll down like waters, because justice for the poor is true worship of God.

Call to Worship (from Amos 5:6, 14-15, 24)

Seek God and live,

**And let justice roll down like mighty waters.**

Seek good and not evil,

**And may righteousness roll like an ever-flowing stream.**

Love goodness and establish justice,

**And the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to you.**

Come, let us worship our God,

**Who leads us in the way of righteousness, justice, and peace. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we confess that we do not often show mercy. We hold others to high expectations while neglecting Your own expectations of us. We complain about others not living up to their responsibilities while we forget about the poor and those in need around us. We dismiss the concerns of others believing that our own concerns are right and just. Forgive us for our lack of compassion and understanding. Forgive us for not listening fully to others. Open our hearts and minds to You, and to our neighbors in need. In the name of Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We know we are not perfect, but God’s perfect love is in us. When we extend compassion and understanding to others, we are reminded of God’s compassion towards us and God’s understanding mercy and peace. Forgive, and you are forgiven. Love, and you are loved. Care for others, and know that God’s care is with you. Amen.

Prayer

Love and Light, shine in us Your ways of love and understanding. Help us to turn our ears towards those who are different from us. Help us to listen in the light of Your love to understand, and to be filled with empathy and compassion. For we do not know the sufferings that others have experienced; we do not understand the pain that has been caused; we do not know what it is like to be in another’s shoes. But You, O Christ, have become one of us, living the human life, and through Your love and compassion we can see one another as our kindred. Help us to have that same love, understanding, and empathy towards others. Amen.