Worship Resources for September 2, 2018—Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Song of Solomon 2:8-13 and Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9; Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 and Psalm 15; James 1:17-27; Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

Narrative Lectionary: Stewardship and Generosity, Luke 12:13-34 (Psalm 51:15-17)

We shift from the rise of the kings to wisdom literature in the first selection of the Hebrew Scriptures, moving from the stories of Solomon into the writings attributed to Solomon. Song of Solomon is a collection of love poetry, probably sung at royal weddings, and brought together to be a dramatic play about love. In 2:8-13, the lover returns after the winter, and everything is fresh and new. Love is rejuvenated in the reuniting of lovers.

Psalm 45:1-2, 6-9 are selections from a love song at a royal wedding, praising God, who is the king above all kings. The psalmist blesses the earthly king at his wedding by proclaiming God’s blessing upon him and God’s anointing.

The second selection in the Hebrew Scriptures from Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 is part of Moses’ final discourse, giving the law again to the people. Most likely written during the time of the reforms of King Josiah, the writer as Moses instructs the people to keep the commandments, to remember the ordinances and statutes, but most importantly to pass them on to their children and children’s children. In the story arc, the people are about to finally enter the land God has promised them, and they will face great challenges. This instruction is to keep them rooted in God’s ways—and for the writer in Josiah’s time, to give an example of what happens to a people who forget the ways of God.

Psalm 15 is a prayer before entering the temple. The psalmist asks who may enter the sanctuary of God? Those who examine themselves, who live in God’s ways, who honor God with their lips and in their deeds, who care for their neighbors and do justice. These are the ones rooted in God’s ways.

The Epistle reading begins a series in James this week, with 1:17-27. The writer of James is unknown, though some attribute the letter to the brother of Jesus. James is writing to counter an extremist view of Paul’s teachings on faith and works, and the main point of this letter, and this first chapter, is that faith without works is dead. Faith requires transformation in ourselves. It changes how we think, how we speak, how we act, and how we view the world. Religion is worthless without this transformation. True religion requires us to care for those in need around us, to work for justice, and to not be deceived by the ways of the world.

The Gospel readings return to Mark for the remainder of the season after Pentecost and pair well with the readings from James. In this passage, Jesus and his disciples are eating, and some of the religious leaders notice they did not ceremonially wash their hands beforehand. Jesus argues that how they live out God’s ways is more important than the minute details of tradition. We do well to remember that when the Gospels say “Pharisees,” this is not to mean all of the Pharisees, but some of the religious leaders who were encountering Jesus at that time. This is a conflict that runs through most religions and was not unique to this situation: how do we interpret our tradition and scriptures and live them out? Jesus’ interpretation is similar to how other rabbis in his day would interpret as well, that the tradition of the elders is not as important as the way we live them out.

The Narrative Lectionary ends its Stewardship and Generosity series with Luke 12:13-34. In this passage, someone has come to Jesus demanding that the tell his brother to divide their inheritance. Jesus responds with a parable of a rich man, who was so consumed with gaining more that he built bigger barns when he ran out of space to put all his crops. That very night, God told him his life was being demanded of him, and all these things he had stored up—to whom would they belong? Jesus continues by teaching his disciples to not worry about the things of this world, what they will eat or wear, striving for more things. Instead, they are to work for the kingdom of God, and treasure in heaven, which cannot wear out.

Psalm 51:15-17 teach that the sacrifice God desires is a heart broken open, rather than burnt offerings and sacrifices. It is what the sacrifice does to us that God desires rather than the routine of the ritual.

It’s easy to pay lip service to religion, or to an ideology or philosophy. But true religion, true philosophy, true belief means that we live out what we speak and teach. It means that we live out the commandment to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves by showing our devotion to God and to our neighbors. It means that we change our worldview to where we understand God as the awesome creator of everything, that we only have a small part in all of this, but we care for what God has given us and use what we have to do God’s work in the world. It calls us into a deeper way of love for God and one another, a deeper way of life and living.

Call to Worship

Come, rejoice in what God is doing in our world!

 **Come, be in awe of God our creator!**

God has given us hearts to love, bodies to live and breathe, souls to rejoice!

 **God has made us, beautiful and wonderful beings!**

God has made the whole universe, and is continuing to make all things new;

 **God is doing something new in our lives, right now.**

Come, join your hearts in worship of our magnificent Creator!

 **Come, rejoice in our God!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty One, we confess that at times we ignore You. We strive for our own ways, fulfilling our own desires, thinking that by the name of Christian we can get by, by the speaking of the right words we are saved. Our lives are too busy and there is too much going on for us, to really sink deeper into what we mean by what we say. Call us away from the temptation to make everything simple and instead, remind us of Your invitation to a deeper way of life. Draw us in to Your love, that transforms and changes us. Draw us in to a deeper love for one another, that transforms and changes the world. Lead us to a greater understanding of what it means to be saved, to save our neighbors from poverty and despair, to save this world from our own destruction, and to live into the fullness of Your love that is eternal. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s love changes the world. God’s love transforms us, and we are never the same. You can never go back to the person you used to be, but you can continually be transformed and renewed by God’s love. You are forgiven. You are made new. Go, and transform the world with God’s love. Amen.

Prayer

God of Peace, enter our hearts, our minds, our bodies, our souls. Slow down our heartrate. Open our mind. Breathe new life into our bodies. Quiet our souls. Be present in us, in this world, in our relationships, in this air we breathe in now. May Your peace enter us, flow through us, and join with others. God of Peace, lead us in Your ways of peace, and help us to be more present. Amen.