Worship Resources for September 22nd, 2019—Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Jacob Wrestles God, Genesis 32: (9-13), 22-30 (Mark 14:32-36)

The prophet Jeremiah is heartsick over what is happening to his people in Jeremiah 8:18-9:1. To the people, it feels like God has abandoned them, and Jeremiah understands this, even as he prophesies against them for the ways they have turned against God. He laments over the downfall of Judah.

The psalmist pleads for God’s deliverance in Psalm 79:1-9. They have experienced the siege of Jerusalem and the desecration of their temple. The psalmist sees this as consequences of the people’s actions, and that God is angry with the people. The psalmist calls upon God to be angry with the nations that do not know God, that have caused this destruction. Pleading with God to remember their ancestors, the psalmist calls upon God for deliverance and forgiveness of their sins.

The prophet Amos sees how corrupt the people are in 8:4-7, where the wealthy elite are more concerned about being able to make money after the religious holidays than they are in serving those in need. Amos warns against going through the motions of religion without caring for those in need. God won’t forget what they have done, claiming to be religious while ignoring and/or exploiting the poor.

In contrast, the psalmist praises God who raises up the poor in Psalm 113. God is above all nations, and when God looks down upon heaven and earth, God takes notice of the poor and lifts them up, to make them just as important as princes and rulers. God takes note of those on the margins—not only the poor, but the women unable to have children, all those marginalized in their society—God brings them in from the margins and rejoices in them.

Continuing in the pastoral epistle of 1 Timothy, chapter 2 begins with a request to pray for those in power and leadership. God desires everyone to be saved and to come into knowledge of the truth. There is one God, and Jesus came as the mediator between God and humankind. Paul (so the writer purports to be) has come as a teacher and an apostle, to share the Good News, especially to the gentiles—those outside of the Jewish tradition and faith.

Jesus tells a very difficult parable in Luke 16:1-13. In this parable, a manager is brought up on charges that he was squandering the owner’s property. In order to save his position, he cuts deals with the people who owe money to the owner, so that he has allies if he loses his position with the owner. The owner has to credit the dishonest manager because he’s managed to save his own reputation and gain allies. Jesus seems to be asking the question of what is your currency—is it actual money, or is it relationships? The dishonest manager has made relationships with others, and relationships will last much longer than wealth of this world. Make friends, establish relationships with other people, as that is of lasting value, rather than the wealth of this world.

The Narrative Lectionary has a theme on names this season, and this passage focuses on Genesis 32:9-30. Jacob is on his way to meet his brother Esau, the very brother he once stole his birthright from. It’s been a long time, but Jacob has just left his father-in-law’s house, and is unsure of what is coming next. He prays to God for deliverance, and that night, while he is alone, he wrestles with a man until daybreak, a man who knocks Jacob’s hip out of joint, but is unable to overcome Jacob. Jacob recognizes that this man is an angel from God, and asks him for a blessing. The angel declares that his name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel: One Who Wrestles With God.

In Mark 14:32-36, Jesus is preparing for his own arrest, and alone, at night, prays for God’s deliverance, but also prays for God ‘s will to be done. Though he has three friends with him, they fall asleep, and Jesus is, for all intents and purposes, alone, praying to his Father.

In the world of our creation, money and worldly possessions are measures of success. However, in the reign of God, the value is relationship. How do you love God? You must love others. The more you love, the more love you know. In our religious life, we’ve sometimes made our practices and traditions the currency, but they are meaningless without the love of our neighbor. Love is the value, the currency, the measure of success. Love more, and know God’s love more deeply.

Call to Worship

Worldly pursuits of wealth and notoriety lead to dead ends;

**The way of Christ leads by love.**

Worldly measures of success lead us to busier, hectic lives;

**The way of Christ leads to justice and peace.**

Slow down, consider what you are living for;

**Live for God and for others, and you will find yourself.**

Come, join the way of Christ, love one another, care for other’s needs;

**Come, worship God, who leads us into true life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Author of Salvation, we confess that we have created our own world and built it around our own measures of success. We have written our own paths that require more productivity, more consumption, and measure status and success by worldly gains. Forgive us, for we have failed to remember that Your reign is not of this world. Forgive us, for we have judged others and ourselves by what we have in material wealth. Call us back into Your ways, in which we are called to love one another, to pursue love as our only measure, for You called us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Hold us to Your reign, for it is eternal, while the ways of this world will pass away. In the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who reigns forever, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We know the Author of Salvation, and we know how the story continues on. We know that love wins—not in the end, but in the new beginning. We know that we have been offered forgiveness and new life in Christ. Go, live into this new life, now and forever. Work for justice, live for peace, and love one another as Christ has loved us. Amen.

Prayer

Caretaking Creator, instill in us the desire to care for one another and for this earth. Help us to cultivate our relationships, understanding the interconnected nature of creation and our neighbors. Call us away from the fleeting desires of this world and into the intention You instilled in us: to love the earth, to love one another, and to love You. Help us to find our sense of purpose and meaning rooted in the love You have given us, so that we can transform the world to be part of Your reign forever. And help us to remember that You are still caring for us, and have given us all we need to change the world for Your beloved community. Amen.