Worship Resources for September 25, 2016—Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15 or Amos 6:1a, 4-7; Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16 or Psalm 146; 1 Timothy 6:6-19; Luke 16:19-31

Narrative Lectionary: God Works Through Joseph, Genesis 37:3-8, 17b-22, 26-34; 50:15-21 (Luke 6:35)

The prophet Jeremiah brings a living story of hope even as Jerusalem is besieged in chapter 32. Even though Babylon will destroy the temple and take the people into exile, and even through Jeremiah himself has been imprisoned by King Zedekiah, Jeremiah has bought a field, knowing that one day the people will return to the city. Jeremiah, like the other prophets, had warned the leaders that they had gone astray and they would be led into exile. However, when the siege came, Jeremiah saw that God would see them through, that resisting what was to come was futile. Instead, Jeremiah embraces a vision of hope, of God’s restoration.

The prophet Amos warns the wealthy elite that they will be taken into exile, because they are satisfied with the way things are and can only see their own comfort and relative peace, despite the plight of others around them. Therefore, they will be the first to go. They feel safe and secure now, but they will be the first to lose everything because they have not turned to God’s ways.

The psalmist sings of God’s deliverance in Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16. For those who abide in God, God will save them. God will answer them when they call, and God will protect them. There is nothing to fear for those who abide in God.

Psalm 146 is a song of praise to God who is the true king. Worldly princes will fail and will die, but God’s reign is forever because God is the creator of all. God hears the cries of the oppressed and brings justice to the marginalized.

The writer continues to teach in 1 Timothy 6:6-19 that the ways of the world lead to evil, but the ways of God lead to righteousness. Those who want to be rich are already tempted by the ways of the world, and “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (6:10a). For those who are rich, they are called to remember that God has given them everything and to use it for good and be ready to share. The writer encourages them to continue in the way of faith, and to follow the example of Christ who leads us into eternal life.

Jesus tells a parable of a rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. This is the not the same Lazarus as mentioned in John’s gospel account. In this story, Lazarus was seen as a nobody, and yet, we know his name, and not the name of the rich man. After they die, Lazarus is seen with Abraham, but the rich man is in agony. While they were alive, the rich man ignored Lazarus, and Lazarus was tormented by hunger, thirst, sores on his body, and dogs that licked the sores. The rich man ignored him and did nothing to help relieve him; and now there is nothing that Lazarus can do to help relieve the rich man of his pain and suffering. The rich man wants Abraham to send Lazarus to his family to warn them, but Abraham tells him that if they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, whom they have already received and ignored, they won’t be convinced, even if someone rises from the dead.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of Joseph, and despite his brother’s betrayal and selling him into slavery and leaving him for dead, he forgives his brothers and does not hold a grudge against them. His brothers have repented and asked for forgiveness, and he grants it to them rather than holding it over them. However, Joseph did test them at first, concerned that they hadn’t changed their ways, but when he saw that they had changed, he forgave them.

In Luke 6:35, Jesus teaches the disciples to love their enemies and to do good, expecting nothing in return. Loving our enemies is unexpected. It is something that will not necessarily be rewarded by worldly means, but in loving our enemies, we see their humanity, we put ourselves in their shoes, and we can see them how God sees them, instead of through our human eyes. If we expect nothing in return, we will be surprised when enemies are transformed, when our doing good makes a difference.

The Revised Common Lectionary continues this path through the two Testaments of our scriptures on God’s desire for the poor to receive justice, and how often we as human beings stand in the way of that, especially if we have wealth. And the Narrative Lectionary focuses on forgiveness and love by putting ourselves in the shoes of others. And we must do so to seek justice for the poor and oppressed, because it is easy to see ourselves on the side of not having enough, but those of us who are poor in the United States and Canada are wealthy when compared to most of the world. We think of a house with one bathroom as small for a family of four; yet so many in other countries have two or three times as many people in a house with no running water. We may think we are the ones suffering, but if we put ourselves in the shoes of others, we might find that we are not the Lazarus’ of the world, but the rich ones who still do not hear the cries of the prophets. We must repent: do justice, love mercy, seek forgiveness and offer forgiveness readily.

Call to Worship

We choose our leaders and governance,

**But God is the one who has chosen us.**

Our leaders will fail us and disappoint,

**But God will never give up on us.**

In the world of uncertainty, we may not know what to do;

**But God has called us to seek justice, and to love one another.**

Come, worship God, the One who Reigns in our hearts.

**Come, follow Christ, the true Prince of Peace, who gives himself for us. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we come before You knowing we have fallen short. We have taken sides and put our trust in leaders that are easily corrupted. We have broken friendships based on political discourse rather than doing the hard work of seeking justice for the poor and oppressed. We have closed our minds and have ignored racism, sexism, homophobia and other abuses and oppressive viewpoints in order to justify our own struggles. Forgive us, O God, for not seeing Christ our Lord in the faces of all. Forgive us, O God, when we say and do things that we know are not what Jesus taught us. Forgive us, O God, when we deny basic human decency to another, let alone loving our neighbors. Call us back into Your ways. Call us back to the truth of this unjust world, and that we are called to seek justice and righteousness, to practice loving-kindness, mercy, and forgiveness. In the name of Jesus, we pray and repent. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God knows our faults and shortcomings and still offers us forgiveness and mercy. God knows we aren’t perfect and loves us anyway. God made us, and loves us because of our imperfections, not in spite of them, because they are what make each of us unique. God loves you. When you do wrong, correct it; seek forgiveness, and go on loving the world, because God loves us all, and one day, love will triumph over the ways of the world. Amen.

Prayer

God of Hope, help us to cast our vision beyond what we see in front of us. Help us to know that Your love will endure even when we experience pain and hardship. Help us to trust in You even when our future seems uncertain. Remind us that the best is still to come, that You have entrusted to us a future with hope, as You declared to the prophets of old. Remind us that You are continuing to do something new in our world, and in us. As we wait for You to enter our world and our lives again in a new way, help us to not lose heart. In the name of Christ, who will come again, we pray. Amen.