Worship Resources for September 29th—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; Luke 16:19-31; 1 Timothy 6:6-19

We hear the words of hope from the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 32, words that seem unreal, unimaginable. The siege of Jerusalem has begun. Zedekiah the king has locked Jeremiah up because Jeremiah had been prophesying that it was too late: the Babylonian Chaldeans would take the city and the people would go into exile and that fighting was futile. However, Jeremiah witnesses to Zedekiah that there is hope: God will bring them out of exile and will restore the people in their homeland. As a visible witness, Jeremiah buys a field in the middle of the siege, even going as far as to getting the deed signed in the presence of witnesses and burying the deed so it can be retrieved after the exile. A physical, tangible symbol of hope, even though all seems lost at that moment.

Amos, in contrast to the Jeremiah reading, contains a warning before the exile of Israel. Written before the exile of the Northern kingdom, Amos has seen the corruption of the wealthy elite, the ruling class, and how they have pampered themselves and worshipped other gods and forgotten the poor—Amos condemns them, sharing that they will be the first taken away. The ruling class lived in lavish excess while the poor suffered, and did not pay attention to anything but their own success and wealth—ignoring the warning signs all around them that the land would fall to Assyria, that they would suffer just as they had caused their own people to suffer.

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16 contain familiar words of comfort (although verses 11-12 are quoted by the devil to Jesus in the temptation narratives in Matthew and Luke). God will not fail. God will shelter you, care for you, and for all who are faithful, they will know God’s presence. God’s faithfulness will never end.

Psalm 146 sings of God’s deliverance and praise for God’s faithfulness. The listeners are reminded that if they are faithful, their hope is always in God who is the creator. God is the defender of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the imprisoned, the poor and the widow and the orphans. God is the one who will reign forever and brings justice.

Luke 16:19-31 is the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. We are reminded that our focus as faithful followers of Jesus is how we follow Jesus in this life. All too often, Christians focus on eternal life, life after death—heaven. We forget that Jesus specifically spoke about how we need to live for others—the first shall become last of all and servant of all—but yet we don’t live this way. This parable reminds us that our faith in Jesus must be lived out in how we have compassion for others. Because eternity depends upon how we live now. Eternity is not the same as the afterlife. Eternity is what lasts forever—compassion, love, mercy, faithfulness.

1 Timothy 6:6-19 reminds us that “the love of money is the root of all evil.” When we look back at Amos, we see how the rich lived, and how the lust for wealth caused the poor to be trampled on—the writer (probably a disciple of Paul’s) gives a similar warning about the corruptive powers that wealth can have on the faithful. We need to shed the desire to be rich and instead remember the fullness of the promise of God: eternal life, a life that begins now and lasts forever. Riches are fleeting and will fail us, but God’s love will endure forever.

What is worth living for? Wealth, worldly success, fame—it all fades away and will betray us in the end, but love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness endure forever. Christ calls us into the life that endures for eternity. Wealth gives us temporary happiness and success, but corrupts us and holds us to focusing on what we have right now. Christ calls us into eternal life. We share what we have because all comes from God, therefore it cannot be taken away from us.

Call to Worship

God of Creation, You raised the sun up this morning,

**Just as You raised Your Son from death to life!**

Even if dark clouds and rain darken the view,

**You are the Light of the World, and You have called us to be Light.**

In the darkest of the night, we know that daybreak is coming

**The Hope of the World is in You.**

**Join our hearts together in worship,**

**So we might experience Your Light more fully. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, the world has beaten us down. Broken relationships and broken dreams weigh upon us; lost hopes and lost purpose choke us like thick fog. Break through the mist, break through the darkness, break through the brokenness and lead us into Light. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Isaiah 40:31)

“Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Know that God will lift you up when the world is weighing on your shoulders. Jesus takes our yoke upon him. In God, we find strength and courage; through the Holy Spirit, we are renewed. In Jesus, we are set free. Go forth, knowing that you are free, and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Holy God, You hold us close, as precious children, even when we don’t feel so special. We feel ordinary, mundane, just trying to survive, but You desire for us to thrive. You desire for us to live this life to our fullest, to live into Your dream for us. You whisper encouragement in the love and care of those around us. You speak to us still through the Holy Scriptures and the Whole of Creation, through the love of friends and family and the love of the church. Guide us in our lives to remember always that while we may be ordinary, we are always unique and special, and needed by You. In Your name we pray. Amen.