Worship Resources for September 29th, 2019—Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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

Narrative Lectionary: Moses and God’s Name, Exodus 1:8-14 (1:15-2:10), 3:1-15 (Mark 12:26-27a)

In the middle of the siege of Jerusalem, a word of hope is given to Jeremiah, a sign of hope given to the people. In our first selection from the Hebrew scriptures, the prophet is told by God to claim a field in the land of Benjamin that it his by right of redemption. Jeremiah purchases it, takes the deed of purchase and places it in an earthenware jar so it will last a long time, because “houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.” Even though the people are about to be taken into exile and the temple destroyed, God is showing Jeremiah a future with hope.

The psalmist encourages the people in Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16 that God is their refuge and fortress. God will answer those who call upon God, and will rescue them. There is no need to be afraid, for God is their shelter and will protect them from violence, death, and destruction.

The prophet Amos warns the wealthy elite, the ruling class in Amos 6:1a, 4-7 that they will be the first taken into exile, for they have possessions worthy of plunder. They’re the ones living in the lap of luxury at the expense of the poor and life is so good for them, they do not see the signs of what is coming.

Psalm 146 reminds the listeners not to put their trust in worldly rulers, for they are mortal and will die, but to put their trust in God who will not fail them. God is the one who “executes justice for the oppressed” and provides for those in need. God frees the imprisoned and watches over those who have been marginalized. God will reign forever.

The epistle reading continues in 1 Timothy with 6:6-19. The writer warns about falling into the temptations of this world, especially of wealth and power. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. The writer urges the reader to pursue righteousness, goodness, and faith instead of worldly pleasures. However, the writer encourages the reader to teach the rich to use their resources for good, not for their own gain or enjoyment, but to be generous, ready to share, and lay up a good foundation for the future—treasure that is not of this world.

Jesus tells the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16:19-31. The rich man ignores Lazarus, begging at his door, even sending his dogs out to lick Lazarus’ sores. Eventually both men die. Lazarus is with Abraham, but the rich man is in Hades, being tormented. He calls upon Abraham to send Lazarus to ease his suffering with some water, but Abraham and Lazarus cannot cross the great chasm, and the rich man had his whole life to show compassion and kindness to Lazarus and did not do it. The rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his brothers, but Abraham reminds the rich man that they have Moses and the prophets to listen to. The rich man knows that his brothers won’t listen to what they’ve been taught, but will listen to Lazarus, back from the dead—but Abraham tells him that if they won’t listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they listen to someone who rises from the dead.

The Narrative Lectionary continues a theme on the power of names and God’s covenant with the people. In Exodus 1-3, the people of Israel, named for their ancestor who wrested with God, are now in slavery with Pharaoh committing genocide. Moses, named because he was drawn out of the water, survives the genocide and is raised in Pharaoh’s house, but when he witnesses an Egyptian beating an Israelite slave, he kills him, and has to flee. In the wilderness, through a burning bush, God calls his name, and calls him to lead his people out of slavery into freedom. God tells Moses that God is the God of his ancestors. But when Moses tells God that his people will want to know God’s name, God says, “I AM who I AM,” along with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, their ancestors.

Jesus quotes the end of this passage in Mark 12:26-27a. God never says, “I *was* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” but God always says, “I *am* the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Jesus uses this to show that God is a God of the living, the God of resurrection.

Our God is a God of the living, and our lives now matter. The things of this world will pass away, but not our actions or words. What we do now, how we live our lives, matters to others, and matters for eternity. Eternal life is life that begins now—not after we die. While the warnings of the prophets such as Amos, and the parables such as the story of Lazarus, show us that what we do now effects eternity, they are not meant to make us focus solely on getting into heaven. Rather, they are taught to us to help us change our lives now. As Ebenezer Scrooge changes his life in Charles Dickens’ beloved classic A Christmas Carol—we recognize that while the last vision shown him by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come was his own grave, the vision that changed him was of seeing what happened to Tiny Tim. If Scrooge stayed on his current path, he would end up dead with no mourners, but it’s the thought of Tiny Tim dying and the Cratchit’s losing their son that really causes Scrooge to change his life now. So we are called to change our lives now, to help others have life now.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 146)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul;

**I will sing praises to my God all my life long.**

Do not put your trust in worldly rulers,

**For they are temporary, their plans will fall apart.**

Happy are those whose help and hope is in God,

**For God made heaven and earth, and all living things.**

God executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry,

**God sets the prisoners free, and opens the eyes of all.**

God watches over those on the margins, the strangers, the widows and orphans;

**And God will reign forever. Praise the Lord!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have sided with the rulers, with those in power, those who have wealth, those who have sway over the people. We confess that our ways are not Your ways. We followed false shepherds, leaders who promise the easy way, instead of seeking You. Forgive us. Call us into Your ways of love, justice, and mercy, even when it is difficult. Call us to bring in those from the margins. Remind us that our own redemption is bound in the liberation of others. It is in Christ’ name that we pray, for Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Repent simply means to turn back. Since Christ has promised to be with us always, Christ is always there, ready to receive us. Repent, and know Christ is with you. Know the forgiveness of Christ, the assurance of God’s love, and follow the Spirit into the world for the work of God’s love. Amen.

Prayer

Love that Made the World, we come to You, desiring to draw deeper into the power of Your love. May Your love transform us. May Your love inspire us to create as You are the Creator, and we are made in Your image. May Your love drive us into the work of justice and mercy. May Your love envelope and embrace us, especially when we feel beat down and drained. May Your love inspire us, guide us, and lead us on. Amen.