Worship Resources for September 3rd, 2017—Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 3:1-15 and Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45b; Jeremiah 15:15-21 and Psalm 26:1-8; Romans 12:9-21; Matthew 16:21-28

Narrative Lectionary: Sacraments, Lord’s Supper: 1 Samuel 21:1-9, Matthew 12:1-8 or Mark 14:12-25; or Revelation 21:1-6, 22:1-5 (John 16:20-22)

Moses experiences the call of God through the burning bush to deliver God’s people out of Egypt. But Moses says, “Who am I to do this?” God promises Moses that God will be with him, and when Moses has brought the people out of Egypt they will worship God at the very mountain he is on. But Moses questions further, “Who are you?” What God is the God of their ancestors? This is a legitimate question to ask in a time when there were many gods of many peoples. God reminds Moses that God is the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, and Rachel: This God is I AM.

The first selection for the psalm may sound familiar, as it was the first psalm reading on August 13th. Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45b sings of how God was faithful to Jacob, to the people of Israel. God does not abandon the people, just as God did not abandon Jacob, and God raises up leaders for the people, unlikely heroes who lead with God’s wisdom.

Our second selection from the Hebrew Scriptures continues to follow the prophets. Jeremiah, in 15:15-21, has been ridiculed and insulted in speaking out for God. Jeremiah wants to know why they have had to suffer so much, and God responds that is he is faithful and utters what is precious, not what is worthless, the people will turn their hearts to hear his words. If Jeremiah doesn’t give in and tell the people what they want to hear, God will deliver him. God knows it is a hard call, but Jeremiah must stay true.

Psalm 26:1-8 calls upon God for deliverance. The psalmist comes before God proclaiming their innocence and their faithfulness to God. The psalmist steers clear of evil and asks God for protection, justice, and vindication before their enemies.

Paul teaches in 12:9-21 how the early Christians in Rome, who faced misunderstanding at best and the threat of persecution at the worst. Paul guides the Roman Christians to live in love and peace with others, to do what they can to live in peace with others, and to overcome evil with good. As Paul nears the last quarter of his letter, he wants to impress upon the Roman Christians that faith in Christ is a way of life, a way that brings out the best not only in those who practice but in all who encounter them.

Jesus tells Peter, “Get behind me Satan!” after Peter only moments before declared that Christ was the Son of the Living God. Peter tried to talk Jesus out of going to the cross when Jesus began to teach that the Son of Man would suffer and die. Jesus knew he had to go through the cross in order to show the disciples the way to eternal life, but Peter, understandably so, didn’t want Jesus to die. But Jesus shows Peter that it is not about saving ourselves, but living for others that leads to eternal life.

The Narrative Lectionary wraps up its summer series. The first, on the Sacraments, finishes with the Lord’s Supper. In 1 Samuel 21:1-9. David comes to the temple in secret, but the only bread for him and his men to eat is the Bread of Presence, reserved for the priests. David declares that he and his men have kept themselves holy (they haven’t slept with women) and the priest Ahimelech gives David the bread, and at the same time gives David the sword of Goliath to carry out the king’s mission.

In Matthew 12:1-8, Jesus and his disciples are hungry on the Sabbath and pluck heads of grain to eat. The religious leaders are upset that Jesus’ disciples have broken the Sabbath, but Jesus reminds them that David ate the Bread of Presence and that the priests break the Sabbath to perform their duties. Jesus declares that the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath, because the Sabbath was created by God for the people, not as a rule but as a gift.

Mark 14:12-25 contains Mark’s account of the Last Supper, during the Passover Meal when Jesus takes bread and breaks it, and the cup and pours it out, and says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Jesus also uses this opportunity to declare that one of them, one of his own, will betray him. This must have disturbed the disciples, who thought they were coming to celebrate the Passover, not hear about Jesus’ body broken and blood shed, or his betrayal at the hands of one of them. They may have been shocked, horrified at what was happening, and perhaps some beginning to finally understand that the path to eternal life had to go through death.

The second Narrative Lectionary series completes Revelation with chapters 21 and 22, the vision of the new heaven and the new earth. There is no more mourning or grief, for the Lamb has made all things new. The new city has the river of life flowing from the throne, and there is no more death, no more night, and those that live will live in light forever. There is healing of the nations. There is hope. There is peace.

Jesus compares his death and resurrection with childbirth in John 16:20-22. There is pain, and there will be grief, but there will be great rejoicing in the resurrection. The disciples will grieve, but then they will rejoice, if they remember that this is only temporary. Jesus is fond of the image of labor and birth (see chapter 3) as symbolic of what we go through in death to eternal life.

Our faith is a way of life. God’s name hints at being, a verb instead of a noun. Jesus attempts to teach the disciples again and again that faith is not about saving ourselves but living for others. Those who lose their lives will find it. Moses was concerned whether or not anyone would listen to him or believe him, but God led him to trust and speak the message of deliverance anyway. Sometimes living into God’s ways seems foolish, even outright deadly, when one doesn’t live for themselves. But as Paul taught, when we do our part to love one another, care for one another, pray for one another, and live in peace with all, as much as it depends upon us, others will be drawn to that way of life. We don’t have to save ourselves because we save each other by living for others, the way Christ lived for us.

Responsive Reading of Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine;

**Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.**

Love one another with mutual affection;

**Outdo one another in showing honor.**

Do not lag in zeal;

**Be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.**

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering;

**Persevere in prayer.**

Contribute to the needs of the saints;

**Extend hospitality to strangers.**

Bless those who persecute you;

**Bless and do not curse them.**

Rejoice with those who rejoice;

**Weep with those who weep.**

Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty;

**Associate with the lowly, do not claim to be wiser than you are.**

Do not repay anyone evil for evil,

**But take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.**

If it is possible, so far as it depends upon you,

**Live in peace with all.**

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written:

**“Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.”**

No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink.

**For by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.”**

Do not be overcome by evil,

**But overcome evil with good.**

Call to Worship (abbreviated version of above, 12:15-18)

Rejoice with those who rejoice;

**Weep with those who weep.**

Live in harmony with one another, do not be haughty;

**Associate with the lowly, do not claim to be wiser than you are.**

Do not repay anyone evil for evil,

**But take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.**

If it is possible, so far as it depends upon you,

**Live in peace with all.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of The Way, You have shown us the Way, and the Truth, and the Life through Jesus Christ. But we have made the faith into a list of rules. We have watered down the faith into a get-into-heaven admission ticket. We have made the faith about ourselves and our own needs and desires, instead of following the example set by Jesus: to love our neighbor as ourselves, to become last of all and servant of all, to serve others before ourselves. Guide us back to The Way. Remind us of how the early followers of the faith came together and lived in community. May we reach out to others in our communities, seeking to meet the needs of those around us, and sharing the love of Christ by example. In the name of Jesus, who continues to show us the Way, the Truth, and the Life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

In living for others, we find life. In loving others, we find the love of God. In seeking justice, we find and create peace. In finding Jesus, we find the example of how we are to live. Go, loving Jesus, loving your neighbor as yourself, and live into the way of Christ. Know you are forgiven, loved, and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Sojourning God, prepare us for the journey of faith, by granting us a beloved community that loves and prays for us. Send us on the journey of faith with the knowledge that when we love others, we know Your love. When we do our part to seek justice, we find we are justified. When we live in peace with others, we find peace. Help us to know that the destination is the journey of faith, a constant ground of renewal and growth. Help us to find rest in the beloved community along the way. Help us to be the beloved community to prepare others for the journey of faith, by loving and praying for others and sending them into the world to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with You. Amen.