Worship Resources for September 4, 2016—Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 18:1-11 or Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 1 or Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18; Philemon 1:1-21; Luke 14:25-33

Narrative Lectionary: The Lord’s Prayer, Luke 11:2-4

God uses the image of the potter’s wheel in Jeremiah 18. The potter is not happy with what has happened—the shape has spoiled, so the potter has reworked it. In the same way, God can shape what is to come for the people who have gone astray. God can shape a new future if the people turn from their ways, but God can also change their mind about what they were to make, if the people do not change their ways.

In this passage that tradition attributes to Moses, Deuteronomy 30:15-20 declares that the people have a choice to make. If they choose the way of God, they will live full, abundant lives. God has set forth commandments and decrees that lead to abundant life. Heaven and earth are witnesses to the commandments of God.

Psalm 1 declares that the righteous are like trees with deep roots, that will not be blown away, and they will bear fruit, unlike those who are blown every which way by the winds of life. Those who are rooted in God find delight in living into God’s ways.

Psalm 139 is an intimate prayer, acknowledging that God is the one who has formed us in the womb, who knows us better than anyone. God is beyond our comprehension, and yet, we come from God. We are unformed, but God shapes us, and in the end, we return to God.

One of the shortest books in the Bible, Paul’s letter to Philemon while Paul is in prison appeals to Philemon to receive Onesimus, Philemon’s former slave who ran away. Paul praises Philemon in such a way that Philemon will be shamed if he does not do what Paul is asking. Paul uses rhetoric to show that if Philemon really is a faithful Christian there would be no question of his accepting Onesimus, but Paul does so in a way full of compliments and praise so that Philemon cannot refuse.

Jesus speaks of weighing the cost in Luke 14:25-33 in order to fully understand what a life of following Jesus entails, that one must be willing to give up everything and go all in. Following Jesus is not a movement or a fad, but a way of life, that leads through the cross, and will cost everything. In Jesus’ day, for the disciples, the cost included family relationships.

The Narrative Lectionary concludes its series on the Lord’s Prayer that has followed the same passage of Luke 11:2-4 for the previous three weeks.

Luke’s account is very short and doesn’t include all of the words Protestants use in the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. All Jesus includes is this: Father, hallowed be your name (God our Parent/Father: your name is holy). Your Kingdom Come (God’s beloved community, God’s kin-dom, God’s reign, come). Give us each day our daily bread (fulfill our daily needs). And forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone indebted to us (forgive others because you are forgiven; forgive others the things you ask for forgiveness for; forgive us, because we forgive others). And do not bring us to the time of trial (do not bring us to that point where we are tested beyond what we can face). That’s it—five statements. Five you can remember on your fingers. Five things we should pray for—the first two really are statements to God, not asking for anything, until we get to our daily bread, asking for forgiveness, and to not be led into trial.

God has created us for life, an abundant life—but the ways of this world tempt us away from God’s abundance into short-term self-satisfaction that often leave us empty. God is continually molding and shaping us towards our intended being, even when we go astray.

Call to Worship

Our Creator is molding us into something new,

**Open your hearts to God’s love and forgiveness.**

God is at work, nurturing and caring for us, to live in a new way;

**The Spirit is calling us back to God’s abundant life.**

Jesus is leading us in the way of God’s love.

**We are here to worship God, and to shaped by God into the fullness of God’s intention for us.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we have placed limits on our lives and the lives of others that You did not intend for us. We have sought worldly gains and have failed to achieve the world’s promises. We have sought wealth at the cost of other’s needs. Forgive us for not seeking Your intention for full, abundant lives in You. Call us back into Your ways of loving our neighbor as ourselves and caring for the well-being of others, and the world You gave us. In the name of Christ, who declares our sins are forgiven, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The Spirit sings in us the song of new life. The Spirit breathes in us the promises of hope and forgiveness. The Spirit moves us to seek compassion and justice. Fill your lives with the Spirit, and you will be full. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Gardening God, You have planted us firm in Your commandments, rooted in love: to care for our neighbors, to honor one another, and to remember You first and foremost. Water us in Your Spirit; nurture us in the words of Jesus; feed us with the love of one another that sustains us. For we are the recipients, and we are the givers of Your love in this world. Help us to sustain one another, to lift up one another and to care for one another, sharing in our joys and sorrows, our struggles and our celebrations. For You have planted each one of us, a seed full of potential and love, and have given us the promise of new growth now and through eternity. Amen.