Worship Resources for September 6, 2015—Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Labor Day Sunday (US)

Revised Common Lectionary: Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23 or Isaiah 35:4-7a; Psalm 125 or Psalm 146; James 2; Mark 7:24-37

Narrative Lectionary: Hebrews 11:1-16, 12:1-2

Our first thread in the Hebrew Scriptures delves into the Wisdom Literature for this second half of the Season After Pentecost. In these selected verses from chapter 22 of Proverbs, we recognize the call to justice for the poor. God’s Wisdom calls us to do the right thing, which is to be generous, to share what we have, and to work for justice, for God hears the cries of the poor.

Our second thread follows the prophets, and this passage from Isaiah reminds us that God is always working in our world for justice. And while God is working to restore what has been taken, we must be cautious in our reading of these verses: God’s justice is not about making blind people see or deaf people hear—God’s justice is about restoration. For those who were disabled in Jesus’ day (and still sadly in our time) they were pushed to the margins—unable to work, forced to beg, considered outcast and unclean. God’s justice calls for restoration of all people—that all people are valued and treated with dignity and are restored to society.

The psalmist compares God to Mt. Zion and the mountains surrounding Jerusalem in Psalm 125—their strength, endurance, and protection remind the psalmist of God’s protection of Jerusalem. The psalmist calls upon the people to do good because God desires for goodness to reign—and where there is goodness, there is peace.

In Psalm 146, the psalmist sings praises to God who is just, feeds the hungry and frees the imprisoned. God is the one our trust belongs to, not to worldly leaders who will fail us, and will eventually die. God is the one who hears the cries of the poor and the widows. God is the one who is our true sovereign and will reign forever.

James 2 speaks of not showing partiality, but that we are to treat the poor with honor and respect, to help those who are in need. We are to be consistent in our treatment of one another and not show favor to those who are rich or dressed better, but rather to meet the needs of those around us. The writer of James sharply reminds us that faith without works is dead (vs. 17).

Mark 7:24-37 contains the story of the Syrophoenecian woman (in Matthew 15 she is a Canaanite woman and she calls out to him from the street) who happens to be in a house that Jesus had hoped was empty. She is the one person who calls out Jesus, in all of his ministry that we have recorded, after she has been turned away by him. And Jesus changes his mind because of her. Next, Jesus heals a deaf and mute man after touching his ears, and spitting and touching his tongue, calling out, “Be Opened.” Who was opened—the deaf and mute man, or the minds of those around him, as Jesus’ mind had just been opened?

The Narrative Lectionary completes its section on Hebrews with 11:1-16 and 12:1-2. In these passages, the writer remembers our ancestors in our faith, the great “cloud of witnesses” and their faith, and that we live by their example, knowing God has prepared something greater for us, far beyond what we can imagine, where Jesus reigns with God forever and death is no more.

Wisdom challenges us to look beyond ourselves, to view beyond what we can see and experience, and to know that we are part of something greater than ourselves. We are called to work for justice, to live in righteousness, to do goodness, for God is good. Jesus calls for us to “be opened.” Where is God calling you to be opened? What needs are not being met? What good can you do?

Call to Worship

By faith, our ancestors followed God into the wilderness;

 **By faith, they found the place God had promised them.**

By hope, we follow Jesus the Christ;

 **By hope, we work for justice and reconciliation.**

By love, Jesus went to the cross and died for us.

 **By love, we give our very lives to Christ.**

May we enter this time of worship with our hearts opened;

 **May we be prepared to give our lives to Christ, to follow Jesus**

 **In faith, in hope, and in love. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we confess that at times we cannot see beyond our own needs. We cannot move beyond the disappointments we have in life, and we forget that there are many in need in our communities. Forgive us for those times we put our desires in front of the needs of others. Call us back to Your ways of justice and righteousness. Remind us that our faith is often not about what we feel inside, but how we live outwardly. In the name of Christ, who gave his life for us, who called us to be last of all and servant of all, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God knows our inmost thoughts, and our heart’s desires. God knows that sometimes we just want to be happy, satisfied, and content. But God is calling us to a greater joy. By serving Jesus, we serve one another, and we find joy and peace in Christ Jesus. Come, know this joy found in God, and work for the good of all. Amen.

Prayer

God of New Beginnings, help us to open to new insights and ideas. May we be challenged to look beyond ourselves, to try new things, to be open to new experiences. Help us to let go of our prejudices, our long-held perceptions, and those opinions that shape what we take in, so that we may be opened to Your calling in our lives, to the needs of this world. Guide us to follow You, the one who leads us into life. In the name of Christ, we pray all things. Amen.