Worship Resources for September 6th, 2020—Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 12:1-14 and Psalm 149; Ezekiel 33:7-11 and Psalm 119:33-40; Romans 13:8-14; Matthew 18:15-20

Narrative Lectionary: Series on the Lord’s Prayer, Luke 11:2-4

The Passover is established in Exodus 12:1-14. While this passage gives instructions for the date for the celebration, the details are pertinent to the people in Egypt at that time, to slaughter the lamb and put the blood on the doorposts, for the angel of the Lord to pass by their house. The lamb was to be roasted and eaten with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, a meal that in the future would remind them of their haste to leave Egypt, the bitterness of their oppression, and how God passed over their homes, sparing them. Though it is a celebration, there is remembrance of the mourning of the people of Egypt, how oppression harms everyone.

Psalm 149 is a call to worship for the people, singing them into celebration, praising God as their king. It is also a call to battle, to prepare the army for war. The psalmist calls the people to praise God in dancing and music, for God delights in the people. The song also calls the people to be prepared to battle the enemies of their kingdom, the enemies of God as the psalmist sees them, to imprison the kings who are against them. The faithful ones are called to execute God’s judgment.

The prophet Ezekiel is instructed by God to give warning to the people and leaders who have gone astray from God’s ways in Ezekiel 33:7-11. The words from God are harsh. If Ezekiel does not deliver these warnings, and the people do not turn from their wickedness, though they die from the consequences of their actions, the guilt is on the prophet. However, if Ezekiel delivers the message and they still don’t turn from his ways, he’s off the hook. Nonetheless, God does not desire death and punishment. These are the consequences of the actions of the leaders and the people. Instead, God desires restoration. God wants the people to turn back, and calls upon Ezekiel to speak to the leaders of Israel.

The psalmist calls upon God to learn instruction in Psalm 119:33-40. The psalmist desires to learn God’s ways, to seek wisdom and understanding. The psalmist wants to turn away from the ways of the world—the selfishness and vanity—and instead, turn to God, because the psalmist knows that God’s ways lead to life. For those who are in awe of God, the promise of God is for them.

Paul sums up his discourse on Christian living in Romans 13:8-14. All the commandments can be summed up under Jesus’ call to love one another. Love causes no harm, therefore, love is the way. Paul then uses the metaphor of waking up—it’s time to wake up from the sleep of this world. It’s time to be ready for God’s salvation. Instead of living in the ways of night—the ways of this world that lead to sin—we are called to live in the light.

Jesus gave instruction to the disciples on how to resolve disputes where one disciple has harmed another in Matthew 18:15-20. These instructions were given to the disciples who were in community with each other, and were not meant to be formulaic, but an example of how community should act. While Jesus tells the disciples that whatever they bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven, this is a grave responsibility—we must be careful about inclusion and exclusion. These actions are not to be taken lightly. For Jesus is wherever two or three are gathered in his name. Too often, this passage has been used for disputes in theology rather than harm caused by one to another. Too often, victims have been told to forgive the perpetrator, or the victim is the one who ends up being cut out from the group.

(Same as the prior three weeks) The Narrative Lectionary continues its four-part series on the Lord’s Prayer, the same scripture each week of Luke 11:2-4. See Working Preacher’s commentary and suggestions for preaching this series: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2919> Here is the reflection I wrote back in 2016: 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.

Who are our enemies? The scriptures for this Sunday cause us to wrestle with a challenging issue. What do we do when someone has sinned against us? When someone causes us harm? How do we handle this when they are part of our community, our family? While the Hebrew scriptures were written in a time when war was common, when survival of the people was caught up in the struggle with neighbors, we still have enemies today. Jesus said, “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” in Matthew 5:44. But loving our enemies when we are still harmed by them is a difficult task. Jesus offers the disciples a way forward, but it is one that sometimes gets misused, where the victim is not heard and asked to leave. These are difficult passages, but Jesus reminds us not to take this lightly. We always begin with love, and we do what is possible to participate in God’s reign and reconciliation. For God does not desire punishment, as the prophet Ezekiel taught; God desires for us to turn back to God’s ways.

Call to Worship (Psalm 149:1, 3-5)

**Praise the LORD!**

**Sing to the LORD a new song,**

**Sing God’s praise in the assembly of the faithful.**

**Let them praise God’s name with dancing,**

**making melody to God with tambourine and lyre.
For the LORD takes pleasure in God’s people;**

**God adorns the humble with victory.
Let the faithful exult in glory;**

**Let them sing for joy on their couches.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Triune God, You created us to be in relationship, for You are a relational God, and You made us in Your image. However, we have distorted Your image and broken relationship with You and others. We have abused and misused power. We have caused harm, sometimes unaware of our power and privilege. Call us into accountability, O God. Call us into the hard work of seeking forgiveness, which includes restoring what has been lost, repairing what has been broken. For all of us have sinned, all of us have fallen short, but sometimes, we are not aware of the damage we have done. May we be open to criticism that builds up, even when it calls us out, and listen to those for whom we have caused harm. Soften our hearts, O God, to hear words that are hard, for You are with us. Your gift of forgiveness and grace frees us to enter the work here on earth, to help repair and restore, as the heavenly kingdom is ready for us. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (Romans 13:10)

“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” Love leads us to forgiveness. Love leads us to grace. Love leads us to mercy and compassion. Fill your hearts with love and know God’s love is with you. Know that God’s forgiveness, grace, and mercy, are given freely to you, for you are God’s beloved child. Go forth and share this love, seeking forgiveness, and offering mercy. Amen.

Prayer

God of All Seasons, we do not know what lies ahead, but we know we are not alone. We know that You will see us through this season of Coronatide. You are with us as we continue the struggle for justice. You have led us through great trials in the past, and though we have forgotten, the scriptures tell us of the hardships Your people faced and how they survived. We, too, will survive this. God of All Time, remind us that You will see us through, that we will live into new struggles, new seasons, new trials, and will help us then, as You have been with us, and are with us now. May we know in this moment that Your presence is with us in our very breath. Now and always, we give thanks and praise to You, O Ancient of Days. Amen.