Worship Resources for January 10th, 2015—First Sunday after Epiphany, Baptism of Jesus Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 43:1-7; Psalm 29; Acts 8:14-17; Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Narrative Lectionary: Jesus Heals and Teaches, Mark 2:1-22 (Psalm 103:6-14)

We begin this Sunday with the prophet Isaiah speaking about God’s reassuring presence through times of trial. God is with us when we walk through the waters and the fire. God is with us when we have been exiled and when we return. God is with us in our comings and goings, in our rising and fallings, and we are beloved by God. God’s desire for us is not suffering, but God is with us through those difficult times and sees us to the other side.

Psalm 29 sings of God’s greatness in creation. God is the one who hovers over the waters now, and who hovered over the waters of creation (Genesis 1). The voice of God is the one who brought forth creation and speaks through it, breaking the cedars of Lebanon and shaking the wilderness. The psalmist says that the Lord sits enthroned over the flood (vs. 10); in other words, God is more powerful than the storms and disasters that occur. God will see us through. Nothing in all of creation is too great for God to overcome.

Acts 8:14-17 speaks of Peter and John praying for the holy spirit upon those who had been baptized in the name of Jesus. For some reason, though they had been baptized in the name of Jesus, these new converts had not received the Holy Spirit, and Peter and James go to pray for them that they would be baptized by the Spirit and feel the Spirit’s movement among them. Though they knew of Jesus, they were still waiting for direction and guidance and spiritual gifts.

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22 contains Luke’s version of Jesus’ baptism, which includes John’s words about Jesus as one coming with a winnowing fork, to separate the wheat from the chaff. John tells the crowd that he is not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals of the one coming after him. After the crowds are baptized and Jesus is baptized, the crowds experience the heavens opening and the spirit descending upon Jesus.

The Narrative Lectionary continues with Jesus’ ministry of healing and teaching, and this passage contains three parts. The first part tells the story of the paralytic who was lowered into the house where Jesus was teaching by some brave friends who were willing to dig into the sod of the roof to get him inside. This passage also includes the calling of Levi, a tax collector, as one of Jesus’ disciples. When he is challenged by the religious leaders, Jesus declares that those who are well have no need of a physician—he has come to call not the righteous, but sinners (vs 17). The third part of this passage includes criticism of Jesus’ disciples who do not fast—even though John’s disciples do along with the other religious leaders. Jesus teaches that while he is with his disciples, there is no need to fast, and that things are changing—no one puts new wine into old wineskins (vs 22). It is clear that Jesus’ ministry is doing a new thing, calling forth people to be bold in their faith, to declare that those who are most in need of God’s beloved community are not the religious but those who have been marginalized, and that God is doing something very new, and the old ways are not going to fit any longer.

Psalm 103:6-14 begins with God working for justice for those who are oppressed. Right way, we know that God is looking to those who have been marginalized, not the majority voice. God’s ways are known to the people, but yet they do not seem to understand. However, God does not remain angry. God’s love endures forever, along with God’s forgiveness. We are called to seek God’s justice, and when we stray, to remember God’s love and forgiveness.

God is doing something new, and it won’t fit into the old ways. Look for the work of the Spirit in the world around us. In John and Jesus’ time, in those early days—it was down at the river where the people were gathered. It was that day in the house when the four friends helped their paralytic friend get inside the crowded house. Where is the Spirit now? Where is the Spirit moving and working? It might not be in the places we expect it to be.

Call to Worship

Do not be afraid: God is calling you by name.

**We are God’s people, and we belong to God.**

Do not be afraid: God is with you.

**When we go through trials and suffering, God is with us.**

Do not be afraid: God is gathering us together.

**God is with us, when we are with one another.**

Come, let us worship God:

**Our God is gathering us in, drawing us together as one body.**

**Come, let us worship our God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Creation, we are a people of expectations: we want things to go our way, we want to know what is happening, we want to see the future. But You are a Mysterious God. You have made Your ways known to us and yet You are always doing something new and unexpected. Forgive us when we deny Your work among people we do not know. Forgive us when we fail to see Your Spirit moving among the marginalized and the oppressed, when we stifle and drown out those voices in favor of the comfortable middle ground. Call us into noticing Your work in the world around us. Call us outside of the walls of comfort and into the world of need. In the name of Christ, our companion in faith, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The Spirit dwells among us, moves among us, and stirs in us. The Spirit is calling us to new ways, and renews us. Feel God’s love in the love of others around you. Know God’s forgiveness when you forgive others. Trust the movement of the Spirit, and know God is leading you into new life. Amen.

Prayer

Steadfast Love, call us into a time of renewal. Lead us into new ways of understanding, love and compassion for our neighbor, next door and around the world. Guide us in this new year to knowing Your love and grace and extending that love and grace to those in need around us. Keep us to Your ways of justice and mercy, but stretch us to move beyond our comfort zone in new ways. Take us to new relationships with others, expand our compassion and care and grow in us new hearts to love those different from us. In the name of Christ Jesus, who leads us into new life, we pray. Amen.