Worship Resources for January 12th, 2014—First Sunday after the Epiphany, Baptism of our Lord Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 29; Acts 10:34-43; Matthew 3:13-17

The Isaiah passage is part of the “Servant Songs,” a series of passages by the prophet in which Israel is personified as a person who serves God and who has suffered at times for God. As Christians, we must be careful to read these passages in context and understand this historical reading of the prophet—for many have gone back and read Jesus into these songs, and while we can find a connection, a similarity, or even a common theme of Jesus’ own suffering and serving, we must remember that the prophet Isaiah was writing hundreds of years before Jesus, about his own people who had gone through the Exile, and was giving the people hope as well as a way of understanding what had happened to them. Imagine having gone through something so terrible, and to see God at work in your homecoming, and then be told, “Oh, this isn’t about you, this will be about someone else over five hundred years from now.” It doesn’t make sense. We must read the servant songs together in context with Isaiah and understand that the hope from these passages is similar to the hope we find in Jesus—we find echoes of the story here, but it is not the same as saying Isaiah is talking about Jesus. Rather, we read Jesus’ story into the song of the Servant, and see that God is leading us to a new thing, a new way, a way of hope.

Psalm 29 sings of God’s mighty work in creation. The image of God upon the throne reminds us that God oversees everything. The psalmist uses metaphors that would be understood in that time, and an understanding of God like the other gods in other nations that were seen causing the rain and the thunder and earthquakes—but the psalmist sings of one God, who is above all things, all of creation, of all heavenly and earthly beings.

Acts 10:34-43 contains Peter’s message after his encounter with Cornelius and his dream in which he is commanded by God to eat unclean foods. Peter recognizes that Jesus Christ has come for all people, not just the Jewish followers of the Way, but that from the beginning, when Jesus was baptized by John, his ministry was for all people, both those he ministered to in his lifetime and those who have come to believe after his resurrection. There is no partiality in God; God loves the world, and God sent Jesus for everyone.

Matthew’s version of Jesus’ baptism by John in 3:13-17 shares with us John’s hesitation to baptize Jesus: “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” John’s question really is about himself: is he good enough to baptize Jesus? And many of us may have a similar question: are we good enough to be baptized? We all sin. We all fall short. We all want to follow Jesus and do things that aren’t in line with Christ’s call. But Jesus comes to us. Jesus comes to John and says, “Let it be so now.” John consents to baptize Jesus. So we must consent that God loves us despite our faults and shortcomings. God forgives us. And yes, we are good enough for God because we are made in God’s image, and at our creation, God called us good. God is well-pleased with us. When we choose to follow Jesus, we accept that God loves us, as we are, with our faults and foibles, and all the goodness of creation that we were made.

We have hope in Jesus Christ—a hope that we are loved, we are valued, and we are worthy of God. The world tells us we are not, that our sins and shortcomings define us; but Jesus tells us that we are children of God. Jesus calls us to repent and turn back to God—but also that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to love ourselves because God loves us. God chooses us, again and again, and again. We are made in God’s image—we are made for good works, which God chose beforehand to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:10).

Call to Worship (from John 1:1-5 and Genesis 1:27-28, 31)

In the beginning was the Word

 **In the beginning, we were created in God’s image.**

And the word was with God, and the word was God.

 **Male and female God created us, and God blessed us.**

All things came into being through Christ, and without Christ not one thing has come into being.

 **God saw everything God had made, and it was very good.**

What has come into being in Christ was life, and the life was the light of all people.

 **We are created in God’s image. We are created to be good. We are created to be loved.**

 **We are God’s light in this world. Let us worship Christ and be the light. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we come to You knowing that we do not always believe we are created in Your image. We don’t believe we are good enough. We don’t believe we are worthy of Your love. At times, we deny the image in others. We don’t believe they are good enough or worthy. We refuse to accept them. We abandon them, forgetting they are children of God. Forgive us for not believing in Your love, the love that is for all people, for You so loved the world You sent us Jesus. Call us back to Your ways of love, that we may love our neighbors as ourselves, for You have loved us. In the name of Christ, who is Love, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

You are God’s beloved child. With you, God is well-pleased. You are forgiven. You are restored. You are given new life today and every day. Go and live with this news, and share God’s love with others. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, Your Spirit swept over the waters of creation; You are sweeping over us now, creating something new. Call us away from the distractions of the world to experience what You are doing now, in us, and through us, and in our world. Open us to a new awakening, a new beginning, where we look through the lens of the goodness of Your creation, experiencing all possibilities in You. Turn us away from the negative lens, and lead us to the light. In the name of Jesus, who leads us into life, we pray. Amen.