Worship Resources for January 15, 2017—Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 40:1-11; 1 Corinthians 1:1-9; John 1:29-42

Narrative Lectionary: Sermon at Nazareth, Luke 4:14-30 (Psalm 146 or 146:7b-8)

The prophet Isaiah sings another Servant Song in Isaiah 49:1-7. The Servant was Israel personified (vs. 3), but Isaiah also seems to be speaking of himself, and the words he must speak to the people (vs. 5). As the people return from exile, God has a word of hope for them through the prophet, and they, in turn, become the living hope of all nations, the servant of God in the world, and all people shall see God’s work through them.

The psalmist in Psalm 40:1-11 sings of God’s deliverance and restoration. The psalmist has waited patiently, and God has lifted them up, restored them, and put a new song in their mouth to sing. The psalmist warns against worshiping other gods, for only their God has performed wondrous deeds, and does not require sacrifice and offering, but rather that the people listen to their God, who is faithful.

Paul begins this letter to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 1:1-9, giving thanks for God’s grace found in Jesus Christ. Paul is thankful for the Corinthians and their abundance of spiritual gifts (though later in the letter he will criticize the way they rank some gifts over others). They have the ability to witness to Christ through their spiritual gifts, and Paul prays for strength and encouragement for them, who are called into the fellowship of Christ.

We continue reading John the Baptist’s encounter with Jesus from last week; this time, in John’s Gospel account. John the Baptist declares in John 1:29-42 that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. In John’s account, John the Baptist retells his story of baptizing Jesus to his own disciples, who then choose to follow Jesus, the first two being Simon (Peter) and Andrew. This is a different variation of the story that we will read next week from Matthew’s account of how the first disciples were called, but John’s account links John the Baptist’s ministry as the forerunner of Jesus’, both in preaching and by the disciples who follow them.

The Narrative Lectionary follows Luke’s account and Jesus’ sermon in the synagogue in Galilee. Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah and declares that the scripture has been fulfilled in their hearing. The people love it—it makes them feel good. But Jesus sees through them, and realizes they just want to hear all the good news and have the miracles performed for them that they have heard in Capernaum, and they don’t want to hear the challenging part of the scripture. Jesus shares examples from the prophets of times that the prophets were sent to bring good news to the Gentiles and not to the people of Israel—and the crowd that was listening didn’t like this. They wanted the good news for themselves, not to hear that the good news was for others. Just as Jesus could see through their motives, he passes through their anger and violence and goes on his way.

Psalm 146 sings praise to God, reminding the congregation that their hope is found in God, not in the worldly leaders and kings. God is the one who brings justice for the oppressed and lifts up the marginalized, setting the prisoners free, hearing the cries of the orphan and the widow. God is the one who truly cares for all, for worldly leaders will fail the people. God, however, will hear the cries of those forgotten and pushed aside by others.

We move from John the Baptist to Jesus. We move from a ministry for insiders to a ministry that reaches the marginalized and oppressed. The people who expect that Jesus has come for them are sorely disappointed, because the Good News doesn’t necessarily seem good for them; but those who are outcast by society are the ones God has sent a special message, and messenger, of love.

Call to Worship (from John 1:29, 33-34, 41)

“Here is the lamb of God!”

**We follow the One who takes away the sin of the world.**

“This is the Son of God!”

**We follow the One who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit.**

“We have found the Messiah!”

**We follow the Anointed One, the Christ.**

As disciples, we proclaim boldly that Jesus is Lord.

**Come; worship, follow, and praise Jesus, our Lord.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Christ, we confess that we want to hog the Good News. We hoard it for ourselves. We proclaim that our needs are greater, our desires unfulfilled longer, our own cares more of a concern than the needs of others. Forgive us for not viewing our kindred in need around us. Forgive us for not perceiving the greater picture, and focusing only on our own little corner. Help us to remember that Your love is sufficient for us, and sustains us, so we can love our neighbors as ourselves. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God lifts us up, sets us on right paths, and sings a new song through us. Can you not hear the song vibrating in your very being? Join in the harmony of creation to sing God’s song, knowing that You are forgiven, loved, renewed and restored. Amen.

Prayer

Sojourning God, remind us of our commitment to the journey. We know that it isn’t always easy. There are mountains and valleys, rough places and plains, times of wilderness and times of restful shores. Remind us that our path is not the same as those around us. Each of us has the ability to help one another on the journey, if we only lift our vision from the road right in front of us. Remind us that we are better together, stronger together, and can endure more together. The road before us may be rough and stark, but together, with Your love, we can make it through. Keep us to Your path, even when it is difficult, for Your path is just, merciful, and leads us into life. Amen.