Worship Resources for January 22, 2017—Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

Narrative Lectionary: Fish for People, Luke 5:1-11 (Psalm 90:14-17 or 90:17b)

The prophet Isaiah speaks hope to the people who will go into the first exile in the northern kingdom of Israel. Though they have walked in darkness, they will see a great light. Though they will experience exile, God has already broken the bond of oppression, God has already increased their joy and prosperity.

The psalmist sings a personal song of God’s care and devotion in Psalm 27:1, 4-9, praising God for God’s faithfulness. The psalmist trusts God for protection and salvation, but also cries out to God to not forsake them and to not turn away in anger. The psalmist pleads to God to answer and hear their cry.

We continue Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth. After his initial introduction, he addresses the major issue of the community, that there are divisions and factions among the church, some claiming to follow different leaders, and some lifting up certain spiritual gifts over others. Paul is concerned they have forgotten they were baptized in the name of Christ, not in the name of any other leader, and that the power of the cross is that all die to the ways of the world, which include competition and greatness, because Christ died for all.

Jesus calls the first disciples according to Matthew’s account of the Gospel in 4:12-23. Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, where he grew up—but also where the prophet Isaiah prophesied that the people would come out of exile, out of darkness into light, over seven hundred years before. While the writer of Matthew is concerned with linking Jesus to the prophets, what we can appreciate as Christian readers today is the continuation of the prophetic spirit, to bring Good News. Jesus takes up the same sermon of John the Baptist: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near,” and he calls forth his first disciples from their fishing boats. He calls up regular, ordinary people, to live into a new dream for God’s people.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on a similar story in Luke’s account. In Luke’s account, Simon and Andrew, James and John do not immediately get out of their boats and drop their nets to follow Jesus. At first, they have caught nothing until Jesus comes along, and when they pull up their nets full of fish, Peter tells Jesus to get away from him. Peter recognizes that Jesus is from God, and for some reason, not clear in the account, Peter believes he is unworthy. But Jesus tells him, “Do not be afraid, from now on, you will fish for people.” Jesus believes Peter is worthy, and calls him to follow.

In Psalm 90:14-17, the psalmist pleads for God to have compassion in the verses before, and now, asks for God’s blessing. The psalmist asks God to bless the work of their hands, and to bless the days of their lives, so that their work will be meaningful and that they might rejoice and live in gladness.

Jesus calls us from all walks of life, and at times we feel we are not good enough, or we don’t have enough money, or we don’t have enough time. God uses each one of us, exactly where we are, and for who we are. We all can live into God’s ways of love, justice, and peace, no matter where we live or what work we do, for God will bless us, and see us through.

Call to Worship (from Matthew 4:16-19; Luke 5:8,10)

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light!

 **“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near!”**

Jesus called out to the first disciples,

 **“Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”**

Jesus told the ones who said, “Go away,”

 **“Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.”**

We have no excuse: Jesus has come, Jesus has called us,

**And Jesus is sending us into the world: “Repent! Follow! Go!”**

May we enter this time of worship,

 **Listening for Christ’s call to repent, follow, and go into the world for Jesus.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Jesus, we confess that we have been afraid. We don’t listen, because we don’t want to hear where you challenge us to change. We don’t follow, because we are afraid of where you will lead us. We have not gone where you have sent us, because we are afraid of encountering people different from us, because they may cause us to change. Forgive us for being afraid to listen to You, to follow You, and to go where You have sent us. Grant us the courage to step out in faith, to listen to Your voice, and to be changed by Your love through others and through Your creation. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Psalm 139)

Where can we go from Your spirit? Where can we flee from Your presence? There is no place we can go, no place we can hide, where God cannot find us. The darkness is as bright as day, for God’s light shines in all. Go, knowing that God’s light is shining in you, God is with you, and God loves you. Amen.

Prayer

God of people who fish, people who stare at the night sky in patient wonder, people who daydream in solitude and silence: hear our prayers. God of artists and dancers, singers and painters and composers, of all who create, fueled by Your creative spirit in us: hear our prayers. God of our justice-seekers and kingdom-builders, of all who strive for righteousness and work to welcome in people from the margins, who care for those who are poor and live on the streets, for those who welcome refugees: hear our prayers. God of us all, children and seniors: help us to work hard, to play hard, and to dream bold dreams. In all we do, from day to day, from birth until death, may we be inspired to follow You, and to create and love and restore, as our brother Jesus did. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.