Worship Resources for January 24th, 2016—Third Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 12:12-31a; Luke 4:14-21

Narrative Lectionary: Jairus’ Daughter Healed, Mark 5:21-43 (Psalm 131)

We begin with Nehemiah, the governor in Jerusalem, instructing the priest Ezra to read from the book of the law. The people have returned from exile and have been rebuilding the city and the temple, and Ezra interprets the law for the people to understand in their day, and calls for celebration that they can once again worship God and follow God’s ways in the city where they had been led astray so long ago.

Psalm 19 sings of God’s work in the heavens, that the skies themselves (the firmament) proclaim the glory of God. No voice is needed; the work of creation speaks for God, in the rising and the setting of the sun every day. As the psalmist prepares, they ask for forgiveness, to be cleansed of “hidden faults,” and for God’s acceptance and assurance.

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a continues the discourse of the diversity of the body of Christ and the diversity of spiritual gifts. Each of us is different and in need of each other’s gifts and abilities in order to function as a whole. Those that seem weaker, that don’t seem to have as much to offer, are important and the body cannot function without them. In Corinth, where there were so many divisions and arguments about who was greater, Paul speaks to them of the importance of unity in Christ, the importance of the body as one, rather than individual greatness and strength.

After Jesus’ time in the wilderness, he returns home to Galilee and his hometown of Nazareth. When he speaks in the synagogue—probably the very synagogue he grew up in, with people who knew him—he reads from the scroll of Isaiah. He speaks good news from the time of the return from exile for the people, and Jesus adds his own interpretation, as did Ezra in the passage from Nehemiah. Jesus declares that the scripture has been fulfilled in their hearing, and everyone is listening to him.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the healing of Jairus’ daughter and the healing of the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. In this story-within-a-story, the first is about Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, who comes to Jesus to beg him to heal his daughter who is at the point of death. Jairus comes to him in front of the crowd, not afraid to show his faith in Jesus. The second is about a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years and no one is able to cure her. As Jesus is on his way to Jairus’ house, she reaches out and touches his cloak. Jesus feels the power leave him and asks who touched him, and while the disciples (probably rolling their eyes) ask how anyone could possibly know, the woman comes forward trembling, and Jesus tells her that her faith has made her well (what he often tells those whom he has healed). When he takes the hand of the little girl, after everyone has told him she is dead, and she gets up, he orders them to not tell anyone and to give the little girl something to eat. Both of these stories not only demonstrate that faith makes us well, but that Jesus is concerned about the needs of those who would not have been seen as worth saving in his society, and that Jesus cares about them. He cared very much about the woman, enough to try to find out it was who touched him, and the little girl and her basic needs.

Psalm 131 is a very short psalm about not focusing on big, great things, but focusing and calming one’s soul, to be present with God. It is a precursor to meditation and prayer, to focus on what God wants for us, not what we want in the universe. The last line calls upon the people to place their hope in God, which demonstrates this psalm may have been used as a call to quiet prayer and meditation.

Where do we find hope? Where do we put our trust? For the people returning from exile, they went back to where they heard the good news before. For the church in Corinth, Paul reminded them that the good news was found by being part of the body, by including all the parts, even the ones they didn’t think were important. Jesus reminded the people that the good news is in their hearing and doing the words of the prophets of old. In the Narrative Lectionary, the hope and trust are found in the faith of a woman and the love of a father for his daughter. Faith and love will bring hope (and next week’s RCL reading of 1 Corinthians 13 ties this together nicely: faith, hope, and love).\

Call to Worship (from Revelation 7:9-12)

There will be a great multitude, from every nation;

**We will gather before God and sing praises to the Lamb!**

From all tribes and peoples and nations,

**We will gather before God and sing praises to the Lamb!**

Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne,

**Salvation belongs to the Lamb!**

Amen! Blessing and glory, wisdom and thanksgiving, honor and power, and might,

**Be to our God, forever and ever, Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, we confess that we have fractured and shattered. We have determined what we need and have forgotten the needs of others. We have looked to our own gain without meeting the basic needs of those in our communities. We have cared for those close to us but have forgotten to care for the elderly and the sick in our neighborhoods, the homeless and the marginalized among us. Forgive us. Call us into unity by recognizing the needs, as well as the gifts, that all around us bring. May we remember that we have need of each other, and that others bring gifts that we cannot dream of, that make us part of Your body in Christ Jesus our Lord. Bind us together, Lord, by the movement of the Holy Spirit, so that we may be one. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

We know that there will be a time when we will need help, so may we help each other. We know there will be a time when we need to be forgiven, so may we forgive one another. We know that at all times we are loved by God, so may we love one another. Go and share the Good News, knowing you are part of the body of Christ, and individually, members of one another. Amen.

Prayer

Architect of Creation, create in us new hearts that grow room to love those who are different from us. Draw up plans for our future that include us reaching out to those who are different from us. Remind us that You have built a foundation for us to stand on that will never fail. Call us to trust in Your design for our lives to love and serve one another, especially those who are different from us. Keep us in Your vision, as You continue to build something new in our world and in our lives. In the name of Christ, who has shown us Your blueprints and continues to build the kingdom among us, we pray. Amen.