Worship Resources for January 26th, 2020—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: Jesus and the Gerasene Demoniac, Mark 5:1-20 (Psalm 89:1-4)

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the hope of a new king in 9:1-4. In Judah, a new king was coming into power—Hezekiah. Isaiah saw great hope for the people of Judah in this new king. Israel to the north had attacked Judah, but now was facing conquest and exile by Assyria. Isaiah, however, sees hope for Naphtali and Zebulun, the tribes of the north, and that God will redeem them from their oppressors.

The psalmist calls upon God for aid in Psalm 27:1, 4-9. Beginning with the assurance that God is their salvation, the psalmist sings praise to God. The psalmist is confident that God will redeem them, but also sings of their current struggle, the accusations of their enemies. The psalmist calls upon God to answer, to be present, and to not turn away, for God is their salvation.

Paul gets to the point of why he is writing the church in Corinth in 1 Corinthians 1:10-18. Paul has heard through Chloe, probably a leader in the church, that there have been divisions. Paul is deeply concerned that the church is dividing over what teachers they follow, including himself, or Peter, or Apollos, or Christ. They ought to all be followers of Jesus Christ, for it is Jesus who was crucified. Paul has a connection to the church, but it’s not as deep as others, and he’s glad for that, that he is not the one causing division. Rather they are dividing themselves when they ought to be united under Christ. To outsiders, the message of the cross means nothing, but to those who follow Christ, it is the power of God and what unites them in faith.

The writer of Matthew’s gospel account interprets Isaiah 9 as a reference for the beginning of Jesus’ ministry in Matthew 4:12-23. The community of Matthew’s gospel was Jewish, and the writer focused on finding ways to refer to the Hebrew Scriptures in telling Jesus’ story. After John the Baptist was arrested, Jesus began proclaiming the good news in Galilee (what long ago was the land of Zebulun and Naphtali) and calling forth disciples, Simon and Andrew, and then James and John from their fishing boats. As he went through Galilee, he taught in the synagogues, and healed those who were sick.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Jesus healing the Gerasene Demoniac in Mark 5:1-20. A man in the land of the Gerasenes lived among the tombs near the Sea of Galilee, roaming around, howling and bruising himself with stones. He’d broken through his restraints, and the people said he had an unclean spirit. But when Jesus came to him, the man called Jesus by name, calling him the son of the Most High God, demanding to know what Jesus was going to do with him. Jesus called the unclean spirit out of him, and the spirit told Jesus its name was Legion. But the demon begged Jesus to be cast into a herd of pigs instead of out on the countryside. Jesus gave Legion permission, and the herd of swine rushed into the sea and drowned. When the people came to see what happened, they found the man who’d wandered the tombs, clothed and in his right mind. The pigfarmers reported what happened to the people, and they begged Jesus to leave them. So Jesus got back into the boat to leave, but the man who was formerly possessed begged to go with him. But Jesus told him to go home and tell others what God had done for them. So the man went to the ten cities of the Decapolis and told everyone what Jesus had done for him.

The psalmist rejoices for the people returning home from exile in Psalm 126. The psalmist sings of how God has restored what was taken from them. Those that left their homes weeping still carried the seed for joy, so by the time they return, that seed has grown into a harvest. “They shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves” (vs. 6).

The stories of new beginnings almost always are stories of struggle and hope. Jesus begins his ministry by calling the disciples after John was arrested. Paul begins this letter to the church in Corinth naming the divisions he sees, but claiming Christ as the one they are united under. Jesus heals the man possessed by demons, who in turn is commissioned by Jesus to go share the good news. Isaiah sees the desolation that is to come and finds hope for the future in the current situation. If we only see the struggle, we only see the one running among the tombs of the dead—helpless and hopeless. If we only see the struggle, it seems impossible to overcome. But the psalmists sing to God despite their struggles, confident that God will be with them, God will bring them home. Jesus calls forth disciples despite the fear of being arrested. Jesus heals the man once avoided by the people and sends him out to proclaim the Gospel. The seeds of hope are planted, even if we don’t see them now, but they will grow into a harvest.

Call to Worship

When the news of the world brings despair,

**We remember that God always comes through.**

Through the Scriptures we hear the stories of perseverance,

**We sing songs of praise and faith.**

In our prayers we put our trust in God,

**In our love for one another we find our hope.**

We join our hearts in this time of worship,

**Knowing that God calls us in faithfulness to be one.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that at times the world gets to us. We shake with frustration, we sink with despair. We find it hard to sing songs of praise or even to smile. O God, remind us of Your covenant with us. We are Your people, and You are our God. You came to us as one of us, and laid down Your life for us, and live again. In You, may we find renewed hope. In You, may we remember that we are not alone. In You, may we know You have called us to love one another, to belong to each other, to be one. May our faith be renewed and our hope restored, for when we love one another, we love You. In the name of the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are not alone. God created us to need one another. God calls us to belong to each other through mutual love. God made us in the image of the divine. God loves you madly. You are forgiven where you have gone astray. Turn back, and find that God is right beside you, and God loves you so much. Turn around, and trust that you are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, who are ready to journey with you. Go forth, and know that you are not alone. Share the Good News with your neighbor. Amen.

Prayer

God of our Ancestors, breathe new life into the stories of old. Help us to understand what we need to learn, from their mistakes and from their faith. Call us to remember our past wrongdoings, and help us to cling to the faith of old, that You are with us, and You make all things new. Guide us away from the practices of fear and division, and lead us to embrace the love You have continued to reveal to us through Jesus Christ. May the great cloud of witnesses from our past, from our Scriptures and history, teach us how to live in new ways for our future. Amen.