Worship Resources for January 27th, 2019—Third Sunday after the 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: Beatitudes, Matthew 5:1-20 (Psalm 1:1-3)

The priest Ezra preached to the people in Nehemiah 8, near the Water Gate in Jerusalem, after the governor Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of the city that had been destroyed. Ezra and Nehemiah, along with this particular group of Hebrews, had returned from exile a few generations later than the people who returned during Second Isaiah’s time. Ezra preached from the book of the law of Moses, but interpreted it for the people so they could understand. The people celebrated with a great feast to mark this occasion.

Psalm 19 is a two-part psalm. In the first part, the psalmist gives praise for God who is the creator, and the heavens and heavenly bodies proclaim God’s glory. The second part of the psalm speaks of God’s creation of the law, which is perfect. The psalmist sings of the desire for God’s teachings through the law, and requests for God to make them pure, to be cleansed of anything they have done, even what they do not see or recognize. The psalmist closes with a prayer asking that their words and meditations be acceptable to the one who is our rock and our redeemer.

We continue reading Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, and his use of the body as the metaphor for Christ, that we all are part of the body and belong to it. All the spiritual gifts we have been given are useful and necessary, even if they may not seem it to others. God made us all different for different uses, and we ought to uphold the ones who seem weaker, less useful, as more important. We are all given gifts, but Paul encourages the church in Corinth to strive for the greater gifts, which are faith, hope, and love.

Luke’s account of Jesus’ first sermons begins with the same words as when he went into the desert in 4:1. In 4:14, he is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and returns to Galilee to preach in the synagogues there. In the synagogue of his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus reads from the portion of Isaiah in chapter 61, that the Spirit of the Lord is upon him (Isaiah) because he has anointed him to bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and the oppressed to go free. Jesus then sits down to preach, as was the custom in the synagogue, and tells the people, “Today, the scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

The Narrative Lectionary follows Matthew’s gospel account and the Sermon on the Mount, the giving of the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-20. In this passage, Jesus also sits down to preach, and his disciples have come near to him. Jesus shares teachings of good news to the poor, the meek, those who grieve and mourn, those who work for peace, those who show mercy. Jesus goes on to say blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, knowing that the disciples will be witnesses to Jesus and will suffer. Jesus ends this section emphasizing that his work is not to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill it. Jesus’ teaching isn’t to end the law, but to encourage the disciples to live it out.

Psalm 1:1-3 proclaims that those whose delight is in the Lord meditate on the law day and night, and do not follow the advice of the wicked. The psalmist goes on to sing of those who keep the law being like trees rooted near streams of water.

Jesus comes in the line of the prophets before him, proclaiming something new out of a very old tradition. Sometimes, we see Jesus as breaking from tradition, but throughout the history of the Bible, the prophets and priests were having to proclaim something new out of the old. The priest Ezra preached in the square after another group of exiled Hebrews returned home to their ruined city, offering interpretation and understanding. Jesus preached from Isaiah to the people, to hear the good news again in a new context, and on the mountain with his disciples, he proclaimed that he’d come not to abolish the law, but that their righteousness must exceed that even of the religious leaders around them. God is constantly speaking to us through our traditions, not in spite of them, and continues to do a new thing in us.

Call to Worship (from 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 19-20, 26-27)

For just as the body is one and has many members,

**All the members of the body are one, as it is with Christ.**

For in the one Spirit we are all baptized into one body,

**We all drink of one Spirit.**

If we were all a single member, where would the body be?

**Christ has made us: many members, different gifts, but one body.**

We suffer together, we rejoice together, and we worship together;

**For we are the body of Christ together.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator God, You made us all with different gifts, different voices, different abilities, weaving us together to be Your body. We confess, O God, that at times we have disregarded gifts, ignored voices, and dismissed different abilities. We confess that we create hierarchies, unraveling what You have woven together to suit our purpose instead of Yours. We have disassembled and disenfranchised others who are different because they don’t fit our vision or our ideal of what the body should be. Forgive us. Call us into understanding Your ways, accepting that at times Your beloved community doesn’t look like how we imagined it. Help us to grow in our vision and understanding, so that we can accept Your beloved community and participate in it. For the Holy Spirit is the master weaver, still at work, and Christ has bound us together. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

You are valuable to God and to the world. You are needed. There is no one quite like you, no one else that has what you bring, for each of us reflects the image of God and without you, a piece is missing. You are beloved to God, to us, and to the world. Know that you are forgiven when you have gone astray. Come, join us in the work of restoration and reconciliation. Amen.

Prayer

Spirit of Life, breathe upon us. Give us the courage to proclaim release to the captives, to let the oppressed go free. Give us the strength to see things in new ways, to guide others to view Your beloved community growing on earth as it is in heaven. Spirit of Life, grant us the wisdom to use the gifts You have given us for healing and restoration, for bridging together rather than building walls. Spirit of Life, remind us that You have created us not to be alone, but to be together. You have made us one people on one planet; a people made in Your image, to live and grow and care for the earth You created. Help us to remember our created intention, to live into that purpose with Your breath of life, so that others may also live. Amen.