Worship Resources for January 29, 2016—Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

Narrative Lectionary: Healing on the Sabbath, Luke 6:1-16 (Psalm 92 or 92:4)

God is frustrated with the people in Micah 6:1-8, a people that God has delivered time and again, but they continue to turn away from God and God’s ways. God has provided the people prophets and leaders, but they keep turning away. Then the prophet turns introspective, and asks how they should go before God, bringing an offering or burnt sacrifice? What will it take to satisfy God? The prophet answers that God has already told the people what God desires: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Psalm 15 is a song of faithfulness. The psalmist asks the question of who may live with God, and answers the question with those who live their lives with integrity: those who speak the truth from their heart, and whose actions match their words. Those who treat others with respect and do not cheat the poor or turn their back on those in need; those who steer clear of evildoing and do not take bribes to betray the innocent—these are the ones who will abide with God, for they are consistent in word and deed.

We continue our reading of 1 Corinthians and repeat verse 18, that God has turned upside down conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom says to save one’s self, but God has shown through Jesus we must die to ourselves. The cross seems like foolishness, but to those who know Jesus, it is the power to die to one’s self and live for God and others. The wisdom of God declares Christ crucified. Christ has died and Christ has risen. Jesus died to self so that all might live, and so that none of us can do more. None of us can be put on a pedestal, for Christ belongs on the ultimate pedestal, and yet died for us all.

Jesus preaches upon the mountain in Matthew 5:1-12, teaching the disciples that the true reward was what was found in heaven, not on earth. In this world, the poor, the meek, the peacemakers are not rewarded. But it is more than a blessing for “those people”—Jesus is encouraging the disciples to be in solidarity, to receive those same blessings; they must live for others rather than themselves. And the path isn’t easy—they will face persecution and rejection, but they will be included and embraced by God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of Jesus healing on the Sabbath in Luke’s account of the Gospel. This happens right before Jesus calls the remainder of his disciples, but Jesus and his disciples pluck grain from the field on the Sabbath. The religious leaders are quick to accuse them of violating the Sabbath, but Jesus shows them they are being too nit-picky and that even David ate from the temple when he was hungry, though the bread of Presence was set aside only for the priests. On another Sabbath day, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand. It was hard for the religious leaders to argue with Jesus’ reasoning, but he was overriding their authority, and they began to plan what they might do to stop him.

Psalm 92 sings praise to God for the work God does in the world and in the psalmist’s life. The psalmist speaks of the wisdom of God that most cannot understand, but the psalmist has seen God’s faithfulness and deliverance. Verse 4 is the psalmist’s declaration that they sing for joy at the work of God’s hands.

Jesus did not come as a worldly king to rule, but rather came as one to serve others, to the point of dying on the cross so that all might live. Jesus gave himself up for us, and has shown us the path. The world states that to gain in this world shows faithfulness—even some who call themselves Christians declare it. But the message of the cross is foolish to those seeking wealth and gain in this world, but it is the power of God. We proclaim Christ Crucified—not a mighty warrior god who will rule over us, but the one who was fully human and fully God who gave himself up for us.

Call to Worship (from Micah 6:8)

What does the Lord require of you?

 **God has called us to do justice.**

What does the Lord require of you?

 **God is embracing us in love and mercy, as we show our neighbors love and mercy.**

What does the Lord require of you?

 **God desires for us to walk in humility.**

God has told us what is good, and what does God require of us?

 **To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we confess that we have not surrendered to Your ways, but have clung to our own. We do not want to show mercy because we don’t believe others deserve it. We do not want to do justice because we are worried about life being unfair for us. We will not walk in humility because we do not want others to make fun of us, and we do not want to lose our spot in the rat race of life. Forgive us for our foolish, short-sighted ways. Call us into Your ways of loving our neighbor as ourselves, serving others, and becoming last of all, for Your Only Son gave his life for us, so that we might have eternal life in You. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

There is no elaborate scheme, no hoops to jump through or puzzle to solve; God loves you madly. God is calling you by name to walk with Christ. Feel the Spirit move you towards the way of Christ, and love one another, serve one another, seek justice and accept your humble place as a human being. But God loves you madly. You are God’s beloved; with you, God is well please. Go, live, and serve God.

Prayer

Architect of the Universe, we know the moral arc is long, and Martin Luther King, Jr. told us prophetically that it bends towards justice. Bend us to Your will, to seek justice. Bend us to move away from our rigid walls to become bridge builders. Bend us to Your love, and break open our hearts so that we might truly love all of Your children in this world. Bend us toward justice, for the world is broken and needs mending. The world is torn and needs healing. The world is ready to be filled with Your love. Help us to be Your vessels. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.