Worship Resources for January 31st, 2016—Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; 1 Corinthians 13; Luke 4:21-30

Narrative Lectionary: Death of John the Baptist, Mark 6:1-29 (Psalm 122)

The call of Jeremiah when he was a young boy frightened him. He didn’t think he was good enough. “I’m only a boy,” he whined. But God said, “Stop saying ‘you’re only a boy!’” God told Jeremiah he would go wherever God sent him and say whatever God commanded him to say. God ordained Jeremiah to this prophetic ministry, whether he was ready or not, whether he felt he was good enough or not. God calls those whom God chooses, and God calls all of us, ready or not.

Psalm 71:1-6 sings a prayer to God for deliverance. The psalmist recognizes that God is the one who brings us into life. God is the one that we put our hope in from our very beginnings, from our youth. God is the one who will be true, and will save us, and in God we will find our refuge.

1 Corinthians 13 is a song about love as the greatest gift. In Paul’s discourse about spiritual gifts, Paul reminds the Corinthians that there is no greater gift than love, no greater sacrifice, and that in the end, love may be the only thing that remains. Faith, hope, and love abide, these three. But even greater than faith and hope is love.

Luke 4:21-30 repeats verse 21 from last week: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus had read from the scroll of Isaiah. The crowds gathered there, at that synagogue in Nazareth, were amazed, remarking to themselves. But Jesus doesn’t let them be comfortable for too long. Jesus lets them know that he hasn’t come to bring them good news, but to bring good news to those on the outside—and uses the story of the widow at Zarephath, a non-Israelite whom Elijah helped when there was a famine in Israel, and the story of Naaman the Syrian who was healed by Elisha. Both prophets were called to help those on the outside, those who hadn’t known God, those who were in need—not from among their own people, let alone their hometown. Those listening didn’t like this, and the crowd rose up against Jesus, but he managed to pass through the midst of them and went on his way.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Death of John the Baptist in Mark 6. Herod became concerned that Jesus was John the Baptist returned from the dead, because Herod was probably haunted by John’s death. He had John thrown into prison because he didn’t like John’s criticism of his relationships, but other than that, he thought John was a holy man. Herod’s wife really didn’t like John because of his criticism of her marriage to Herod, and she wanted him dead, and with his daughter, schemed to have John beheaded by Herod, for Herod rashly gave an oath that he would give anything to his daughter Herodias that she wanted (a flashback to a story in the Hebrew scriptures from Judges 11 and the story of Jephthah’s rash oath that cost him his daughter’s life).

Psalm 122 is a psalm that prays for the peace of Jerusalem, the place of the temple and the throne of David, where God has dwelled and where God’s anointed kings have ruled. The psalmist declares they will seek peace, and the goodness and well-being of others, for the sake of God who dwells among the people.

Be careful what you speak! If you say you are too young, you’re not good enough, you are speaking against God who has already chosen you! Be careful what you seek—if you are looking only to hear that you are doing good and you are all right, God will point out that there are others in need and God will send good news to them. Be careful what you promise! For only God has the power to give and take. Instead, seek God’s desire, listen for God, and follow where God is leading you. Live into God’s ways of love.

Call to Worship (from Romans 13:8-10)

Love one another,

**For the one who loves has fulfilled the law.**

Love one another,

**For all the commandments are fulfilled, if we love our neighbor as ourselves.**

Love one another,

**For this is the law of Christ.**

Love does no wrong to a neighbor,

**Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.**

**Come, worship Christ, who calls us to love one another. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we insist on our own way. We think we know what we are doing. We think we know better. We think that our way is the right way. Forgive us for not seeking your ways. Forgive us for not silencing our ego and listening to the needs of others. Forgive us for justifying ourselves and our way of living while others go hungry and homeless. Call us back into Your ways of love and justice, humility and mercy. In the name of Christ, whom we follow, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. But love is how we know. We are forgiven because we are loved by God. We are restored because we are loved by God. We have faith because we have God’s love in us. Go, share forgiveness, and share love, because God has loved and forgiven you. Keep the faith, and share the love. Amen.

Prayer

Maker and Molder of the Universe, make us into new beings by molding our hearts into new vessels of love. Transform us from only loving those who love us to loving all. Shape us to be more open to the needs of the world. Shift us away from our selfish ways, and smooth out our rough edges. Craft in us new ways of loving our neighbor and working for Your justice in the world. In the name of Christ, who makes all things new, we pray. Amen.