Worship Resources for December 10th, 2017—Second Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

Narrative Lectionary: Ezekiel, Valley of Dry Bones, Ezekiel 37:1-14 (John 11:25-26)

Most scholars mark Isaiah 40 as the beginning of Second Isaiah, a prophet who took up the mantle of the earlier Isaiah over a hundred years later. Second Isaiah begins with the message of “Comfort, my people!” A message of hope. The people who have been in exile are going to return home! Though the people have gone astray, God has come to gather them like a shepherd, and will lead them home—gently leading the mother sheep (Side note: Second Isaiah uses several images of mothering for God). Through the wilderness, God will make a way. The valleys will be lifted up, the mountains brought low, the rough places made a plain. In other words, God is restoring the unevenness in the world. God is restoring things to their created intention. And God is bringing the people home.

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 is a psalm of hope. The psalmist speaks of God’s restoration, of righteousness and peace meeting each other in a kiss. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet, as faithfulness springs up from the ground and righteousness comes down from the sky. All good things are brought together in God, who forgives the people and speaks peace to those who turn back.

The writer of 2 Peter speaks of the Day of the Lord, and how no one knows the day or hour. Quoting roughly from Psalm 90, the writer states that God’s time is not our time. The writer also uses Jesus’ own words about the Day of the Lord coming like a thief, and urges the receivers of the letter to have patience, and to be found by God at peace.

The beginning of the Gospel according to Mark quotes from Isaiah 40, linking the words of hope from the prophet to the coming of John the Baptist, the one who came before Jesus. John proclaims a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, calling upon the people to repent, to turn back to God. While John comes baptizing with water, the one who will come after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit. In other words, God is about to be revealed to the people in a new way, but only to those who turn back to God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones. The bones, as God tells Ezekiel, are the house of Israel. Their hope is dried up, but God has plans for new life. God promises Ezekiel that God will bring the people out of their hopeless grave and into the life promised them, a life filled with God’s Spirit. The people will know God because it is God’s Spirit that will reside in them.

Jesus tells Martha after her brother Lazarus has died in John 11 that he is the resurrection and the life. In Christ, those who believe and live in him will never die. Jesus then asks Martha if she believes this, and she answers (after these verses), “Yes.”

In the traditional Advent themes often used this time of year, this is the week of “Peace.” God is preparing to do a new thing, and though the passages referring to the Day of the Lord are often full of fearful images, we are reminded that there is new life after death. There is hope. And we are encouraged to be found at peace. Peace is attained when justice is fulfilled, when the valleys rise up and the mountains bow down. Peace is attained with faithfulness springs up and righteousness comes down. Peace is attained when there is hope, and encouragement, and trust that God is doing a new thing, and the new thing is the restoration of what God intended all along.

Call to Worship

The voice of one is calling in the wilderness:

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

Come away from shopping and busyness to a place of reflection;

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

Do not listen to the loudness of commercialization, but quiet your hearts and minds;

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

Come, because here, all things are ready, as we watch and wait for the signs of Christ’s return:

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have given in to the ways of the world. The lights are beautiful, the trees are trimmed, the wonder and awe of the season is upon us, and yet we can’t enjoy it because there is too much to do. We have forgotten the reason we do all of this: to remember the light that shines in the darkness. We have forgotten the reason we prepare: to welcome Christ into our world and our lives in a new way. We have forgotten the reason we need this: because the world is broken around us, and needs healing and wholeness. Come, Lord Jesus, Come. Enter our world and our lives in a new way. We need this Advent season to remind us that You are at work in us, right now, and we wait for the fullness of that revelation. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. All things came into being through God, and without God, not one thing came into being. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. Your light still shines. With God, may your light shine bright, and may you know the peace of Christ in your hearts. Go, serve God, by loving your neighbor as yourself, and be the light you wish to see in the world. Amen.

Prayer

God who made Night and Day, Your light shines in the darkness. Help us to see the beauty of darkness, to know that the darkness is as bright as day. Help us to know You are present with us, always. Help us to know You are already active in this world and in our lives, and that we have a part to play in revealing Your love to the world. When the world seems hopeless, help us to reveal all the hope that is found in You. When the world seems to be without peace, help us to reveal the peace that is found in You. In the name of Christ, who is our shining light, our guiding hope, our Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.