Worship Resources for December 2nd, 2018—First Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Narrative Lectionary: Faith as a Way of Life, Habakkuk 1:1-7; 2:1-4; 3: (3b-6), 17-19 (Matthew 26:36-38)

The prophet Jeremiah, about to head into exile, speaks words of hope from God to the people. Jeremiah declares that God will fulfill the promises made to Israel and Judah, and will raise up a new king who will rule as David did, one who will live out justice and righteousness. The people will then live in safety and they will be known by others as ones who follow the God of righteousness.

The psalmist puts their trust in God in Psalm 25:1-10. They plead with God for their enemies to not have victory over them, and that they will not experience the shame of defeat. The singer seeks God’s ways and truth, for they know God is their salvation. They ask God not to remember the sins of their youth, but rather to be remembered by God’s steadfast love, for God leads the people in steadfast love and faithfulness.

The epistle reading from 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 contains Paul’s prayer to the church in Thessalonica. Paul gives thanks to God for the joy and encouragement they feel because of the Thessalonians, and he prays that they will increase their love for one another. Paul hopes that he will be able to visit with them to encourage them in person, and that they will be strengthened in heart at Christ’s coming again.

Jesus speaks in Luke’s account of the day when the Son of Man comes, recalling imagery from the prophet Daniel, in Luke 21:25-36. Jesus tells the disciples to keep awake, to watch and be ready. He teaches them that there will be signs that the kingdom of God is near, and though others will be afraid, they are to raise their heads—the time of redemption is near. Jesus warns them against falling into the ways of the world—the worries of this life, as well as the ways people escape, such as drunkenness. Be alert, Jesus tells them, and pray for the strength to stand before the Son of Man.

The Narrative Lectionary looks to the prophet Habakkuk and Faith as a Way of Life. Habakkuk was a prophet speaking to the people of Judah right before the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. While most of the prophet’s words are bleak, he gives assurances of hope in chapter two that there is still a vision for the appointed time. Habakkuk concludes with a prayer, that even though things seem hopeless, like a fig tree that doesn’t blossom, he will still rejoice in God, who is his strength and salvation.

In Matthew 26:36-38, Jesus asks the disciples to remain with him and pray, even though he is distressed and grieved. He asks his friends to stay awake with him, so he can do what he must do.

On this first Sunday of Advent, traditionally we speak of Hope. We see hope in the words and promises of the prophets. We see hope in the prayers of the apostles to build up and encourage one another. We see hope in the songs and prayers of old, and in the carols we sing. Hope in God’s promises, the fulfillment found in Christ, and hope for Christ to enter our world and lives in a new way.

Call to Worship

Be on your guard, be alert at all times, be ready:

 **The days are surely coming when God’s promises will be fulfilled.**

Be on your guard, be alert at all times, be ready:

 **The days are surely coming when a righteous Branch will spring forth.**

Be on your guard, be alert at all times, be ready:

 **The days are surely coming when justice and righteousness will come to the land.**

Be on your guard, be alert at all times, be ready:

 **For the Son of Man is about to enter our world and our lives in a new way.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Eternal God, we confess that Your time is not our time, that we are impatient and stubborn. You have called us to wait, and like a child we want to run before the street is safe to cross. We confess that at times we have given up because we have not experienced justice and righteousness as we imagined it. We confess that we have lost hope, for we have put our trust in the things and leaders of this world, instead of You, our Eternal Hope. You are the one who sent us Jesus, and who promised to come again. Help us to know Your faithfulness, mercy, and steadfast love, as we watch and wait this Advent. Come, Lord Jesus, Come. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We remember that when we are about to give up, others are praying for us. When everything is falling apart, someone remembers us and loves us. When we lend a comforting shoulder or a listening ear, we become living hope for others. There is always hope, because hope lives in us, and we must become hope for one another. God forgives you, and God loves you, and God will restore your hope. For Christ came, Christ has come, and Christ will come again. Amen.

Prayer

We are watching and waiting, loving God, for signs of Your coming. We are hoping and praying that You will lead us in new paths, that You will show us once again how we ought to love and live in this world. Help us to stay alert, to not give up hope, though the nights are long and our lives are short. Keep us to faith; help us to be hope to one another. In the name of Christ, our Savior, we pray. Amen.