Worship Resources for December 7th, 2014—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: Esther 4:1-17 (Matthew 5:13-16)

We begin with what scholars call Second Isaiah speaking to the people at the end of the exile. The prophet has words of hope for the people, of God’s justice that is restorative, making a way in the wilderness—the valleys are raised up and the mountains brought down, all the rough places smoothed out. Though it may take a long time, and the people may be indifferent at this point, God will lead them like a shepherd. God will bring them comfort. This is good news for all the people, even if they cannot believe it or see it at this point.

In Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13, the psalmist sings of hope for the people, hope of a return to their home after exile. The steadfast love of God and the faithfulness of the people will meet. Righteousness of those who follow God’s ways and God’s peace will come together, and in the words of the psalmist, “kiss each other.” Faithfulness will spring up from the ground and righteousness from the sky. The ways of the people will finally be turned to the ways of God, and they will come together in harmony.

2 Peter speaks to the coming of Christ in the Day of the Lord, and that God’s time is not our time. On the Day of the Lord, righteousness and faithfulness will come together. There will be new heavens and a new earth, where God’s ways are also the ways of the people, and righteousness is at home. The writer stresses that for those who live in God’s ways, they will be found at peace, and welcomed into the reign of God.

The beginning of the Gospel according to Mark begins with the call of John the Baptist, quoting the words of Isaiah: “Prepare the Way of the Lord.” John comes out of the wilderness proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The way of preparing for God to do something new in our lives and in our world is to repent, to turn back to God’s ways. It is the way we prepare for God’s reign to come, to prepare for the Messiah to be among us.

In the Narrative Lectionary, we read about timeliness. Mordecai suggests to Esther that she may have been called to the place she is in for “such a time as this.” For all that has happened to her—bad and good—she is in a position now of power and privilege to save her people.

Matthew 5:13-16 contains Jesus’ statements that “You are the salt of the earth… the light of the world.” We are called to shine our light, to be the salt of the earth, to live into God’s ways in this time, where we are at.

Advent is a time of preparation. We are preparing for Christmas, to celebrate the birth of Christ, but it is all a grand rehearsal for when Christ enters our world and lives in a new way, when the lines between heaven and earth, death and life, are erased forever. How are you preparing? Are we concerned more about shopping deals, or about justice? The timeliness of the events in Ferguson, Missouri and around the country cannot be ignored. There are cries for justice. Are we participating in the reign of God, or the ways of the world? For those in power and with privilege, what are we being called to do? We remember that the prophet Ezekiel said the high trees would be cut down, and the low trees made high. Mary sings in Luke 1 of the hungry being filled with good things, the rich sent away empty, the powerful being brought down from their thrones and the lowly raised up. This is the good news of the Gospel, but it is not necessarily good news for those in power and privilege. Rather, we must look to God’s ways, and live into the reign of God, being awake and ready, for such a time as this. Only then can we find God’s peace.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 40:1-5)

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.

 **God will make a way through the wilderness.**

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed

 **All people shall see it together.**

The mouth of the Lord has spoken;

 **God is preparing to do a new thing.**

 **Come, let us worship our God, who is coming into our world in a new way. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Justice and Mercy, we confess the brokenness of the system we live in. The rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer. Racism prevails in our judicial system and in our communities. We still segregate and gate off our communities. Break open our hearts, O God. Break us open to compassion and mercy. Break us open to see racism before us, privilege and power. Break us open to move from our rigidity to speak up for justice. Break down the systems and structures that oppress, and help us to build up the reign of God that is at hand and is coming. In the name of Jesus, who breaks down the dividing walls, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

When we turn back to God, we find God has already turned towards us. When we lift up those around us, we find we are lifted up. When we work for justice, we find God’s mercy in our lives. May we be renewed and restored by the love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Prayer

Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done, On Earth As It Is In Heaven. May we live into the vision of Christ, O God, and work to be part of Your reign in this time, in this place. Help us to listen to the cries for justice and to respond. Call us out of our comfortable places, for only You can bring us true comfort. We pray for peace, but help us to seek justice so that peace may come. May we live into Your ways by heeding the prophetic calls for justice, in the past and the present, so we may participate in Your reign now and in the time to come. In the name of Christ, who calls us into New Life, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Peace on Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

Prince of Peace, we come to You on this seventh of December, the second Sunday of Advent; a day in which we focus on Peace in the Christian calendar, and remember in the United States the bombing of Pearl Harbor. May we not forget the lives lost that day. May we not forget our involvement in the war that escalated afterwards. May we remember, in the years after, the rebuilding and restoration that came. May we participate in Your reign by rebuilding and restoring, and honoring the memories of those lost that day by reaching out to those once called our enemies, and may we see Your love in one another, as brother and sister. May peace prevail on earth as it is in heaven, and may we work for justice and live in Your ways of mercy, and build peace together. In Your name, Prince of Peace, we pray. Amen.