Worship Resources for December 8th, 2013—Second Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Matthew 3:1-12; Romans 15:4-13

In Advent, as we read the passages from Isaiah, we must remember the context of the time they were written in. The people had been led by corrupt leadership and kings who were interested in their own self-preservation. Isaiah speaks to the longing of a king who will lead with integrity, who will follow the ways of God and will lead the people into a new dawn. The family tree of David has been stunted by the wars between Israel and Judah, and by the wars with other lands; and now a shoot will grow out of the stump of Jesse. This new king will lead with truth and righteousness, lift up the poor and grant justice to the oppressed. Peace shall come with the reign of this new king. This was the hope Isaiah had for the people of his day, hope for a king that would rule with God’s wisdom. As Christians, we are also waiting for the kingdom coming. We are also waiting and longing.

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 sings of God’s wisdom and guidance for a new king, one who will lift up the poor and the oppressed. The psalmist prays for God’s blessings upon the king, for long life and health and for peace to prevail. The psalmist ends with a blessing from God , who is the God of the whole earth. God’s blessings for one extend to all. God’s desire for the people, and for the whole world, is peace.

Matthew 3:1-12 tells the story of the ministry of John the Baptist. We read these passages in Advent, remembering that as Christians we have often viewed John the Baptist as the one who has come to prepare the way of the Lord. John comes proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John calls upon the people to turn back to God’s ways. In Matthew’s version, there are Pharisees and Sadducees; in Luke’s version, there are tax collectors and soldiers as well. In Luke 3, John the Baptist explicitly tells the people to give back what they have taken—whether it be more than what was owed to them in taxes or someone’s coat. In Matthew, John warns them to “bear fruit worthy of repentance” (vs. 8). John proclaims that one’s identity means nothing without actions. To bear fruit means to bring forth something good, something usable for God. Lastly, John finishes with the image of the threshing floor and the winnowing fork. However, this image has often been used in terms of separating people, rather than separating our own chaff from our harvestable wheat. Chaff and wheat grow together. Each piece must be winnowed and have the chaff removed. We all have places where we need to repent and turn back to God. As we prepare for Christ, we must prepare ourselves, to give our lives fully to God.

Romans 15:4-13 is part of Paul’s discourse about welcoming others. As he nears the end of his letter to the Romans, Paul encourages people to welcome in the strangers, that God also goes to the strangers, to the outcasts, and in this case, to the Gentiles. Paul claims that the Scriptures of old give us hope for today and encouragement. As we prepare to welcome Christ, we must welcome all.

The way of the Lord is peace. We long and wait and hope for the day when God will come into our world and into our lives in a new way. Through the Christian Scriptures, we call this the Second Coming of Christ. We are waiting and preparing for Christ to enter our lives and our world in a new way. But as we prepare, we look back on the scriptures of old and see how the people prepared for a new king, one who would lead in God’s ways, and so we prepare for God’s ways to break through in our lives. And we are reminded by Paul that we are called to welcome the stranger; so we prepare for Christ as if we are preparing for someone new. We prepare for God to come and enter and reign, and that God’s reign will bring peace.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 40):

We hear the voice in the wilderness that calls out,

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

God is going to lift up the valleys and bring down the mountains,

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

God is going to do new something new in our world and in our lives,

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

The Glory of God will be revealed to all.

 **Let us prepare for God to do something new. Let us prepare the way of the Lord! Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we desire our own way. We desire to forge ahead without waiting for Your guidance. We have defined peace to be our own happiness, and have forgotten that peace includes the well-being of all people, especially the poor and oppressed. Forgive us when we have sought our own way, on our own terms, and have forgotten all of Your people. Grant us the wisdom and insight to slow down, welcome the stranger into our lives, and seek out the poor and the oppressed and speak up for justice. In the name of Christ, who is coming unto us in a new way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

We are welcomed because Christ welcomes us. The way has been prepared, choose to follow it. This is not to say it isn’t painful, it isn’t hard, but it is to say it is worth it. You are loved. You are blessed. You are forgiven. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of our Waiting, our Longing, help us to hold on to hope for Your peace to come. We long to hear the angels sing, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace, goodwill to all people.” We long to hear Your peace proclaimed. Help us to live into Your peace by loving our neighbors as ourselves, by seeking nonviolent resolutions, by valuing each life as a gift from You. Grant us Your peace in our lives, so that during our own struggles and challenges, we know that You are with us. Help us to be peace-bearers in our world. In the name of the Prince of Peace we pray. Amen.