Worship Resources for February 11, 2018—Transfiguration Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

Narrative Lectionary: The Man Born Blind, John 9:1-41 (Psalm 27:1-4)

The prophet Elijah is taken up by God in 2 Kings 2:1-12, but not before preparing Elisha to take his place. Elisha asks for a double-portion of Elijah’s spirit, as Elijah removes his mantle to cross the Jordan. While Elisha knows that Elijah most go on, must leave this world, Elisha sticks with Elijah until he can no longer see Elijah in the whirlwind, and then Elisha tears his clothes in mourning and grief. Though Elisha knew this time was coming, through the prophets told him, it was still hard to let go.

The psalmist calls the people to gather in worship in Psalm 50:1-6. God is not silent, but loud as a tempest and a devouring fire. God calls out for the faithful ones, the one who made the covenant with God, to gather near, for God is righteous, and God is the judge of all.

In the second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul speaks of those who do not believe, that the gospel is veiled to them. Belief removes the veil, but the god of this world has blinded them. Wealth, power, worldly success—with these one cannot see past the veil, cannot see the light of Jesus Christ that is the glory of God. God called for the light to shine out of darkness, and Jesus is that light and shines in the hearts of the faithful.

In Mark 9:2-9, Jesus is transfigured before Peter, James and John. When they are up the mountain, Jesus’ appearance turns white, and Elijah and Moses appear with him. Both Elijah and Moses were taken up by God (though Deuteronomy speaks of Moses’ death, Jewish stories tell of Moses being taken up by God as was Elijah). Peter, always quick with his answer through he doesn’t always know what to say, suggests making tents for all three of them. But just as Elisha had to go on from Elijah, so Jesus must go on from Moses and Elijah. Jesus is now the one taking up the mantle. A voice from the clouds says, in a similar way to when Jesus was baptized, that “this is my Son, the Beloved—listen to him!” Jesus took upon the Gospel message from John, and now Jesus takes on the mantle of prophecy and law from Moses and Elijah.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on John’s Gospel account of the Man Born Blind in 9:1-41. The disciples see a man born blind, and ask Jesus who sinned. There was a common understanding that disabilities were caused by sin, though there was debate at that time as to who was responsible for that sin. We must tread carefully in these stories of healing. Jesus is quick to declare that no one sinned. However, some interpret this story that God made people disabled so that they could become inspirational stories (miracle healings), and that is not true. Healing is not the same as curing. When Jesus heals this man, who used to beg (because in that day, if you were blind or had other disabilities, you could not work, you could only beg to survive), he no longer has to beg. He is no longer known as the blind beggar—"Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” (vs. 8). Now, he is one who testifies to Jesus. Jesus uses the metaphor of this man’s blindness with the Pharisees later, who cannot see that this is the work of God. However, we must be careful in using these metaphors. They are in our Scripture, but it doesn’t mean that using the term “spiritual blindness” is the best way for us to convey ignorance of God’s ways and God’s healing. There are other ways we can speak without using ablelist terms. But this story still has a powerful point: the man who was once unable to participate in society, because of the restrictions that society placed on those who were blind, is now able to participate. That’s the healing moment, not that he is no longer blind. Jesus has freed him from those restrictions.

The psalmist reminds the people in Psalm 27:1-4 that God is their light and salvation, and that with God, there is no fear, even when enemies are near. The psalmist asks only to live with God all the days of their life and to behold the beauty of God.

Moving away from our traditional understandings into new insights is always hard, whether it be a new understanding of the Gospel, a new understanding of God’s ways of healing, or “unlearning” things we learned long ago in Sunday School that are no longer useful or helpful. These are tough transitions. Even though Elisha knew that Elijah must go on, he held on as long as he could. Even though Peter knew that Jesus was the Christ, the son of the Living God, he tried to understand Jesus through his own framework of the prophets before him. And even though Jesus healed the man, the Pharisees in this community could not get away from the fact that Jesus performed this healing on a Sabbath day, rather than embracing this member of the community that had once been left out to beg. Perhaps the hardest change we will ever go through is changing our own mind.

Call to Worship

God said, “Let light shine out of the darkness;”

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

God is our Light and our Salvation;

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it;

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

Come, follow the light that shines all around us, whether it be day or night;

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Rabbi Jesus, we confess that we have not listened to Your teachings well. We have followed our own way to benefit ourselves. We have turned away from our neighbors in need. We have put ourselves first, falsely believing that our gain means our survival. Forgive us for not knowing that true life is in You. Forgive us for not serving one another. Forgive us for putting our desires above the needs of others. Forgive us for not loving our neighbors as ourselves. In Your Name, Great Teacher of Love, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

We are still students, and we have not graduated from the school of God yet. We still have opportunities to learn and grow. We can still make up the past tests we failed. We can turn our lives around, by turning back to God, and following our teacher Jesus. You are forgiven, given a clean slate. You are loved, and no one can take that from you. You are restored, so continue to learn, love, and live. Amen.

Prayer

Light of the World, continue to shine around us. Show us the way. Show us how to live. Show us how to love. Light of the World, shine through us. Help us to do our part to share Your light with others. Light of the World, burn bright in us when we are faint. Burn bright in us when we are weary. Burn bright in us when we feel we have no more to give, for Your light is everlasting. Amen.