Worship Resources for February 14th, 2016—First Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

Narrative Lectionary: First Last and Last First, Mark 10:17-31 (Psalm 19:7-10)

We begin Lent (Lent comes from the Latin meaning “to lengthen,” of the lengthening of days in springtime) with a passage about springtime thanksgiving in Deuteronomy, remembering how the people gave an offering of the first fruits of the spring harvest to the priests at the temple. Through this act, they also remembered that their ancestors were once without a home, and after settling in Egypt during a famine in Jacob and Joseph’s days, the people later were enslaved. Freed by God, they came to a land “flowing with milk and honey,” a land that provides for them, and they are to give back to God their Creator out of their thanksgiving. This celebration is not only for them, but for all who reside in the land.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 is a psalm of comfort and assurance of God’s presence, that God will not allow harm to come to those who love God. God is their protector and defender, and God will answer them when they call out. God will even command the angels to protect those who love God from evil.

Romans 10:8b-13 is Paul’s assurance that those who believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised him from the dead will be saved. This passage is often quoted to become a doctrine about how one is saved, but reading in the context of chapter 10, Paul is giving a universal message—salvation is available for all. The old divisions of Greek and Jew no longer apply because of Christ.

Luke 4:1-13 is Luke’s account of Jesus’ temptation by the devil in the wilderness. Matthew, Mark and Luke all contain an account of the temptation. Mark has few details and does not say how the devil tempted him. Matthew and Luke have the same temptations, but Luke reverses the order of the last two, placing the temptation of testing God as the last (quoting from Psalm 91). This period of temptation prepared Jesus for his ministry, because he had resisted evil, down to the last temptation of even testing God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of the rich man who came to Jesus, who wanted to inherit eternal life. In Mark 10:17-31, Jesus asks the rich man, after seeing how well he kept the commandments (and in verse 21, it reads that Jesus loved him), Jesus tells him that he lacks one thing. He needs to go and sell all that he has and give the money to the poor. He will have treasure in heaven, and that he should follow Jesus. But the man goes away grieving. Jesus declares it will be hard for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God, but all things are possible with God. And when Peter, always trying to look good, says, “We’ve left everything to follow you,” Jesus reminds him that the first will be last, and the last will be first. Perhaps that is even a little insight into Peter’s rash behavior—in his trying to look humble, he is too proud about it.

Psalm 19:7-10 declares that the law of God is perfect; it revives the soul, makes wise the simple, and enlightens the eyes. The law of God is more desirable than all the world’s wealth and fruits of harvest.

On this first Sunday of Lent, we rejoice that spring is coming. Resurrection is coming. But in this time when we wait (oh, don’t the seasons of the year always have to do with waiting!), we remember that temptation is all around us to hurry up, to be busy for busy-ness sake, to do things our own way because the other ways are too slow or too simple. Instead, we pause. We remember that Christ gave himself up for us, going to the cross, and that we, too, must humble ourselves, and must remember the needs of others. We will all get there, to that promised land, if we are patient and help one another, becoming last of all and servant of all, resisting the temptations of the world to hurry up and do things our own way.

Call to Worship

The Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness alone;

**When we are lonely, Christ is with us.**

Jesus faced temptation and resisted evil;

**When we face trials in our life, Christ is with us.**

God provided for Jesus and met his needs;

**When we are ready to give up, Christ is with us.**

Enter this time of worship, knowing that Christ is already among us.

**May our spirits be renewed, our faith lifted up,**

**our hearts filled with the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess our pride, O God. We confess that we want to do things our way and at our pace. We confess that in our rush to live our lives we knock over those in our way or let go of others holding us back. Forgive us for not seeing our neighbor in need. Forgive us for causing others to stumble. Forgive us of our sins of pride and selfishness. Call us into Your ways of love and mercy. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Forgiveness/Assurance of Pardon

God knows we want to do things our own way, and it’s hard to stop and remember that God knows best. But when we put our trust in God, we find our spirits renewed. Take a breath. Pause. Slow down. Remember that Christ is with you. Forgive yourself, and forgive others. Know God’s love, and take time to see God’s beauty in creation all around you. Amen.

Prayer

Designer of the Universe, You have designed in us the capacity to love deeply. We close ourselves off because loving so greatly, we become changed, and change is hard. Open our hearts to Your love that surpasses all understanding. Open our minds to new ideas and insights. Open our lives to let others in who are different from us, whom You call Your children, whom we ought to call our neighbors, our kindred in Christ. Open us up, so that we might fully know Your design for us, for our lives, and for our role in this life. Designer, Architect, Creator—fill us with love, as Your intended purpose for us. Amen.