Worship Resources for February 15th, 2015—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: Bearing the Cross, Matthew 16:24-17:8 (Psalm 41:7-10)

We have come to the end of this season after Epiphany. In the Hebrew Scriptures, we have been hearing the Call of God, and this time it is to Elijah to return to God and for God to take him away. Elisha does not want to leave Elijah. He does not want to leave what he knows, what is familiar, what he trusts. Elisha is being tested to step out in faith, and in response he steps out in faithfulness to Elijah, until God takes up Elijah in the whirlwind. Elisha is afraid to follow the call of God alone, but it is time for things to change. It is time for someone new to bring the message of God to the people.

The God who spoke creation into being in Genesis continues to speak, as the psalmist sings in Psalm 50. God does not keep silent, but calls out for justice, and creation continues to speak the message of God, in fire and storm, and in the rising of the sun. God is calling forth and speaking justice in creation every single day.

This brief passage from 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 states that God called forth light to shine in the darkness, and that light shines in our hearts to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. Those who do not believe cannot see the light, and cannot see that Christ is the image of God. True believers proclaim Jesus and not themselves, and serve others in the name of Christ.

Mark 9:2-9 contains the story of the Transfiguration from Mark’s account, in which Jesus, Simon Peter, John and James go up the mountain to pray, and they watch Jesus become transfigured before them, his clothes becoming dazzling white and Elijah and Moses appear with him. The passage echoes the story of Moses, whose face would shine when he was on the mountain with God, and Elijah being taken up by God in the whirlwind. But Peter doesn’t seem to get it, and doesn’t know what to say because he is afraid. He ends up saying “it is good for us to be here” and wants to make tents for each of the prophets before him, but God says, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” Peter is acting as if Elijah and Moses are coming to reign with Jesus on earth, not that Jesus has brought them up to see that this reign is not about an earthly kingdom. After God’s voice comes from the cloud, only Jesus remains, and we assume looking as he did before. Jesus tells them not to tell anyone about what they have seen until after he has risen. It is a glimpse that the line between life and death will be erased. It is a glimpse that the reign of God is not about worldly kingdoms. It is a glimpse that Christ is beyond what they understand and can see in this moment.

The Narrative Lectionary also shares the story of the Transfiguration, this time from Matthew’s account, but begins a little before it, with Jesus’ teaching of taking up one’s cross. Denying one’s self, one’s own desires, to live for Christ by living for others is to put to death the ways of the world—to take up one’s cross. Jesus is preparing the disciples for the time to come, when he will no longer be with them—and to understand that things are not always as they appear. The line between life and death, between earth and heaven, will be blurred with the resurrection.

Psalm 41:7-10 speaks of the hurt of betrayal, but knowing that God will raise up the ones betrayed, that they will be vindicated by God. Echoed later in the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, we know that betrayal is one of the most destructive and violent evils that can happen to us, or that we can do to another, but God is the one who will remain faithful.

The Transfiguration is a story that in the lectionary we use to bookend the season after Epiphany. Christ was revealed to the world by the Magi, by his baptism by John in the river Jordan and the breaking open of the heavens, and by his first miracle in John’s Gospel account, turning the water into wine. Now, Jesus has been revealed to the disciples as the Christ, the Son of God, who will be betrayed into human hands. Jesus has been revealed to his disciples that he is no worldly king, and that the kingdom of heaven is drawing very near.

Call to Worship

The world is changing rapidly before us;

**God’s love endures forever.**

Our ways of understanding have been challenged and stretched;

**God’s love endures forever.**

What we once knew has passed away, and we do not know what lies before us.

**God’s love endures forever.**

May we move forward as the body of Christ, assured of God’s presence;

**May we embrace the future with hope,**

**May we know God’s love endures forever. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we confess that we have betrayed the Good News by turning inward, serving ourselves first. We have not taken up our cross and we have been too quick to build up worldly possessions for ourselves. Forgive us for not helping to reveal Christ to the world. Forgive us for not living into Christ’s example and serving those in need before serving ourselves. Draw us back to the way of Christ, so that we might know the reign of God is drawing near. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is the Creator who calls forth light out of darkness. God is the one who restores the earth after the flood. God is the one who makes all things new. You are made new in Christ. Go and share the Good News of God’s love, forgiveness, healing ad restoration. Amen.

Prayer

Author of Salvation, write into our hearts a new way of life, a way that we learn to live for others and not for ourselves. Write into our hearts the memories of Your faithfulness so that when we are afraid, we can step out in faith even while trembling. Write into our hearts the promise of new life now, and eternal life to come. In the name of Christ Jesus our Lord we pray. Amen.