Worship Resources for February 16th, 2014—Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Deuteronomy 30:15-20; Psalm 119:1-8; 1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Matthew 5:21-37

In Moses’ final discourse in Deuteronomy, Moses declares to the people that they have a choice: death, or life. If they choose the commandments of God, to love God and walk in God’s ways, they will live and see God’s blessings. Moses gives them a final warning to choose life by choosing God, for if they do not, they will not see the blessings God has in store for them. They will not experience their new home or new life. It is not an easy path to choose, but it is the right way to live.

Psalm 119:1-8 begins the longest psalm in the Bible, an acrostic poem with eight lines per letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first eight verses are the first letter of the acrostic, and focuses on righteousness. Those who walk in the ways of God, who follow God’s commandments, will find happiness and satisfaction. The psalmist longs to live this way, desires to follow God with their whole heart.

In 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, Paul continues to address the divisions within the church in Corinth, echoing back to the first chapter, reminding them that people like Paul and Apollos are mere human beings, servants of God, the one who has called them. Paul also uses some wonderful imagery that sometimes is lost in light of chapter 12 and Paul’s image of the church as the body of Christ: here in verse 9, Paul declares “We are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.” Again, there is an image of unity with diversity. We are different parts of the building, differing plants in the field moved by the same wind.

Matthew 5:21-37 is the third part of our four-part series of chapter 5 in Matthew this month in the lectionary. Whereas last week’s passage informed the reader/listener of the importance of the law and that Jesus came not to abolish it but fulfill it, now we hear from Jesus a new interpretation of that law. “You have heard it said… but I say to you…” Jesus focuses on the importance of reconciliation, even to the point of trying to reconcile one’s own self with one’s self. Not only ought we attempt to be reconciled with those we have harmed or sinned against, we also need to be reconciled with the parts of us that sin. Rather than going to the extreme of tearing out our eyes or limbs, we need to recognize that we are sinners, and offer forgiveness and reconciliation—and an attempt to remove ourselves from temptation whenever possible. This is why divorce is such an awful thing in Jesus’ eye—it removes the possibility of reconciliation for that relationship, although there can still be healing. We are not perfect, and we will still sin—but perhaps, in attempting to live into God’s ways, we can find forgiveness and reconciliation.

Reconciliation is not easy. It is a returning to our created intention—to be in relationship with God and with one another. Sometimes this is not possible with others—but with God all things are possible. And perhaps, besides being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, we can also be reconciled to ourselves—forgiving ourselves and learning to sin no more. Then maybe we can work on reconciliation, whenever possible, with others—knowing that sometimes it is not.

Call to Worship:

We gather to pray together and to praise our God!

**We gather to join with one another on the journey of faith.**

We gather to sing and to lift up our voices to God!

**We gather to lift up one another’s burdens, and know we are not alone.**

We gather to follow Jesus Christ our Lord!

**We gather to seek the wisdom of God and to share Christ’s love.**

Come, let us join together in worship.

**Let us worship our God and follow our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have taken Your commandments and turned them into rules. We have criticized those who have fallen short and selfishly proclaimed ourselves righteous. We have failed to understand the spirit of the commandments and the Way that was shown by You to live, loving God and loving our neighbors. Forgive us for turning Your law into burdens for others and ourselves, instead of a Way to love and freedom in You. In the name of Christ, who has given us the Way and leads us on, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

You are loved. Love is the Way. When you love God, you love others. When you truly lay down your life for others, you lay down your life for God. Give yourself to God by serving others. Know that in God’s love there is forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. Amen.

Prayer

Loving God, show us the Way when we fall. Show us the Way when we turn to hate. Show us the Way when we clench our fists and refuse to forgive. Show us the Way when we stop listening. Show us the Way when we look only to ourselves. Show us the Way when we forget what our faith is all about. Show us the Way, the Way of Your love. In the name of Christ, who leads us home, we pray. Amen.