Worship Resources for February 17th—First Sunday of Lent

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

(For Ash Wednesday and other Lent resources, please see the Lent/Easter page under Special Resources)

As we begin Lent, we are reminded of the signs of God’s promises to the people. In Deuteronomy 26:1-11, we remember God’s promise to the people, that one day they would enter the Promised Land, and that they would celebrate by giving back of the first fruits of the land. As they settled into their new home, they would also remember that their history was of being a wandering people, from their ancestor Abraham, a wandering Aramean, to having themselves wandered in the desert. Deuteronomy also has a call to show compassion to those aliens who live among the people, for all those who wander, and to give back to God from the place they now call home. The journey of Lent begins with a reminder that our ancestors were wanderers, and we, too, are on a journey of faith for which we need to give thanks.

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16, is familiar to Christians as the scripture quoted by the devil while Jesus was in the desert, but this psalm brought assurance of God’s deliverance and protection to the people. For the people whose ancestors had wandered, shelter of the Most High was an assurance of God’s presence, a safe haven, an understanding that they were protected. For those who are faithful, they will find shelter, security and safety in God.

Luke 4:1-13 tells the story of the temptation of Jesus when he is in the desert. While Mark’s Gospel doesn’t tell of the temptations Jesus faced, we are given three temptations by the devil in Luke’s account (note that the second and third are reversed in Matthew’s version). We are reminded of the perseverance of Jesus and our own need to persevere against temptation. In Lent, we seek repentance and forgiveness, to turn back to God from where we have gone wrong, and to seek new life in Christ as we journey to the cross. We are reminded of our own need to repent when we have failed, but also to know we are forgiven, and that we can turn from the temptations of the world to the ways of God.

Roman 10:8b-13 is often taken out of context as a “formula” by which one is saved, but when read in full context, we see that Paul is dismantling the concepts that both Jew and Greek Christians held, in that Jesus is the same Christ to both—there is no requirement of circumcision or of special proof, there is no special status to those grafted in (chapter 11) or those who were part of the branches, all believe in the same Jesus the Christ. On this journey of faith, there is a danger of saying some are in and some are out, some are not worthy, or have a lesser place. But even among the Israelites who entered the Promised Land, there were resident aliens, and God reminded them to welcome the strangers and the aliens just as they were welcomed as strangers. So too, followers of Jesus need to welcome others, recognizing that we believe in the same Jesus the Christ.

Lent begins as a journey to the cross, a journey of repentance and self-denial, a journey of serving others. We are also reminded that our ancestors were sojourners, that we are called not only to seek forgiveness but to forgive and reconcile with others, and that we have faith in the same God, the same Christ, and when we are seeking God, we are seeking relationship with each other. The journey reminds us that we are in this together, pilgrims to the cross, where we put to death what has separated us from God and live in the hope of resurrection.

Call to Worship

Out of a faraway land, God called Abraham and Sarah

 **Our ancestors trusted God to lead them to a new home**

Out of Egypt, and out of the wilderness, God called Moses, Aaron and Miriam to lead the people

 **Our ancestors followed God’s commandments to a new land**

Out of exile, God called the people to return to their home

 **Our ancestors believed in the promise of God to a new life**

In this season of Lent, we journey with Christ to the cross

 **Let us follow our Lord into the hope of resurrection. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We are broken by sin in the world. We feel powerless to help the hungry and the homeless, the problems seem overwhelming to us. Lord, break through the sin of the world. Help us to find ways to stand up to injustice, to stop participating in systems of sin. Guide us into ways of life that lessen harm to others and the earth. Keep us to paths of righteousness, justice and mercy. In the name of Christ, who overcame temptation, and who journeyed to the cross and gives us the hope of resurrection, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Don’t give up. God has not given up on you. As long as you breathe, you have life, you have hope, and you can rejoice, for God is doing something new in you. You are forgiven, you are loved, and you have new life. Go and share this Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of our ancestors, You became known to us as a God who is always with us, a God who travels with us from place to place. You are also a God who travels with us through our stages of life, through our grief and joy. You never leave us, even when we sin, when we fall short, You are with us. You have shown Your faithfulness in history, in our stories of faith in Scripture, and in our own lives. Call us to seek a deeper understanding of You in our lives, that we may draw closer to You and Your ways. In the name of Jesus, who draws us close, we pray. Amen.