Worship Resources for February 2nd, 2014: Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12

The prophet Micah speaks to a people who have been led astray by other gods and by leaders who have failed to look to God’s ways. Micah tells how God recalls the acts of deliverance of the people in the past, and the faithful leaders God has raised up. Moses specifically names Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Micah declares that all of creation is listening; the mountains are acting as a jury in which the people and God come together with their conflict. Micah calls upon the people to set aside the religious practices of the peoples around them, which include giving of the harvest, burnt offerings, even one’s own firstborn child—and instead do what the Lord requires: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with God.

Psalm 15 speaks of those who will abide with God: the ones who practice God’s ways of righteousness and justice, who live out of honesty and give out of their hearts. This psalm is a song of preparation, for those to come before God, they must live into God’s ways.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 continues Paul’s discourse to the Corinthian church, repeating verse 18 from last week’s reading. The message of the cross is foolish to those who do not follow Christ. Who would follow a leader who died such a humiliating public death? Who would follow a leader who was put to death as a common criminal? This is absolutely foolish to those who do not know Christ. Proclaiming Christ crucified is the message that should unite the Corinthians—above all else, they follow a Savior who died for them. This is a scandal to those on the outside. The Greeks, seeking wisdom, would see Jesus as a great teacher but one who is now gone. It is foolish to believe in a resurrected Christ. For the Jews that Paul encounters, Jesus is also a scandal, because the movement didn’t die with his death, but has continued, gaining strength and growing. For the Corinthians, it is because of Christ that they live. It is because of Christ that they have the hope of resurrection. Their divisions are foolish, and they are living as if the cross meant nothing. Paul proclaims they must boast in Christ if they are to boast at all—they are not to look to their divisions, but to seek Christ above all.

Matthew 5:1-12 begins a 4 part series in the Revised Common Lectionary from chapter 5 of Matthew. This passage contains the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus gives his blessings. These blessings are also found in Luke 6, with some differences (and it is a Sermon on the Plain instead). But verse 2 hints that this is not just Jesus speaking to the crowds, but it says he “taught them.” Jesus is not just handing out blessings, but he is teaching like a rabbi by sitting down. What Jesus teaches them is that the ones who are usually not blessed in life, the ones who struggle, the ones who are often outcast and on the outside—they are the ones who are blessed in the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the downtrodden, the ones who struggle—theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are the ones that hunger and thirst for righteousness. The merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted. The ones who have lived for God or for others and have suffered for it—they shall receive in the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. As Jesus begins his ministry, the ones who will benefit, who will hear the message, who will follow—they will be the ones who seem unworthy by others. They are the marginalized and oppressed. They are the ones who will be called children of God.

The ones who we would ignore, think unworthy of our time—they are the ones who are important to God. They are the ones whom God has called us to serve: the homeless, the despairing and depressed, the hungry, the refugees of war—these are the ones who shall inherit the kingdom of God, if we do the work of God. We are called to put others first, to see the great need in the world and the needs of those who have been pushed the margins. Too often, we want to see it, experience it, first. We want to receive God’s blessings and then we will go out and bless others. We want to know we are saved and then go out and share the Good News. Christ calls us instead to bless others and put others before ourselves by becoming last of all and servant of all.

Call to Worship

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the downtrodden and despairing,

 **They will rejoice in God’s reign forever.**

Blessed are those who mourn, who are grieving

 **They will be comforted in God’s reign forever.**

Blessed are the ones who seek justice and righteousness

 **They will find it in God’s reign forever.**

Blessed are we when we love our neighbors and seek their needs

 **We will live in God’s reign forever.**

Blessed are we all when we seek to serve others in God’s name.

 **Let us worship together, serving one another and serving our Mighty God. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we come before You confessing that we have taken more than our share. We have wanted to have everything we need in life and have missed seeing the needs of our neighbors. We have worked hard to get where we are and have failed to see that You gave Your life for us, and that we ought to live our lives for others. Forgive us for putting ourselves first over the needs of others. Help us to seek to serve You in all that we do, by serving our neighbors. In the name of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Blessed are you, for you are God’s child. God loves you. God desires the best for you. Give of your best by loving your neighbors as yourselves. Know that you are forgiven. Go and live for others, loving and forgiving. Amen.

Prayer

God of justice, kindness, and mercy, guide us in our lives to live into the ways You have taught us and set before us. Guide us to seek justice in all we do, and to remember that Your justice is restoring and healing. Teach us how to be kinder, to show kindness to all people and to creation, to live with the reflection of Your love in our hearts. Help us to show mercy to others, even when it is hard, remember that You grant us mercy every day. Keep us to the path You have laid out before us, that the prophets spoke of old and the great teachers of the faith have steered us towards. In the name of Jesus, our Teacher, Savior and Friend, we pray. Amen.