Worship Resources for February 2nd, 2020—Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

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

Narrative Lectionary: Jairus’ Daughter Healed, Mark 5:21-43 (Psalm 131)

The prophet Micah argued for pure worship of God in 6:1-8. The prophet, coming from Judah in the south, prophesied to Israel in the north. The people had forgotten what God did for them, bringing them out of slavery in Egypt. The people had forgotten Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. They focused only on the ritual of worship and not the meaning behind the rituals. Micah proclaimed that what pleased God was not sacrificial offerings, but the giving of one’s self to do justice, practice loving-kindness (*hesed* in Hebrew), and walk humbly with their God.

The psalmist asked who may dwell with God in Psalm 15. The psalmist responded with those who do the will of God. Those who speak truth and do not slander, those who live righteously, those who do no evil to their neighbors, those who honor God and turn away from the wicked—but also those who do not bribe others or take advantage of the poor. They will be the ones who dwell with God and will not be moved.

Paul’s opening discourse continues in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, repeating the last verse of last week’s selection: the message of the cross is foolishness to those who don’t know Christ, but to those who do know Christ, it is the power of God. It is the central focal point of faith as Christians. To those who demand signs, there is no other sign. To those who demand wisdom, it appears foolishness, that through Christ’s death we find salvation. Paul argued eloquently that God doesn’t choose worldly wisdom and worldly ways of doing things, but God chooses what the world names as foolish: the weak, the poor, the powerless. Through Christ, all are lifted up.

Jesus taught the disciples in Matthew 5:1-12. Part of the Sermon on the Mount, this selection known as the Beatitudes are blessings to those who live in God’s ways. Because the ways of God are not the ways of the world, it is not an easy life. Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, the peacemeakers, the merciful, those who are persecuted, those who seek justice. In God’s reign, they are the ones who are rewarded. The prophets who spoke for God before were also persecuted, and they will share the same reward in God’s reign.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Jesus healing Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5:21-43. The story of Jesus healing a woman who had hemorrhaged for 12 years is nested within the story of Jairus’ daughter. Girls and women were not seen as equal to boys and men, and children were not seen as important as adults in that time period. A woman who had been hemorrhaging was unmarriable, and probably outcast from her family. Jesus was on his way to Jairus’ home when the woman reached out and touched his cloak, out of faith that if she just touched his clothes, she would be made well. Jesus recognized that someone had touched him in the crowds, but the disciples didn’t understand, because everyone was trying to touch him—everyone was a nuisance, but Jesus knew that this woman reached out in faith. He called her “daughter” and told her that her faith had made her well. While he was speaking to her, someone came from Jairus’ home to tell him his daughter was dead. But Jesus told Jairus, who was the leader of his synagogue, “Do not be afraid, just believe.” Jesus then told those gathered at Jairus’ home making a great commotion, weeping and wailing, that the girl wasn’t dead, only asleep. He told her to get up, and then ordered those nearby not to tell anyone, but to give her something to eat.

Psalm 131 is one of the shortest psalms, a brief, centering prayer to God. The psalmist puts their own thoughts out of their mind and quiets their soul to listen to God. The psalmist then calls upon the congregation to put their hope in the Lord.

Listen. Stop what you are doing. Are you living into the busy-ness of the world? Are you living by the world’s measures of success? Or are you listening to what God has to say to you? What does God have to say to you about how you ought to live? Are we passing through this life, checking off a list of boxes of what we should do, or are we living fully into the reign of God on earth as it is in heaven? Are we caring for the most vulnerable among us—those that mourn, the poor in spirit, the meek, the powerless? Living into the reign of God, the fullness of life that God has for us, leads us into a deeper connection with God and with one another.

Call to Worship (Matthew 5:3-9)

Blessed are the poor in spirit,

 **For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

Blessed are those who mourn,

 **For they will be comforted.**

Blessed are the meek,

 **For they shall inherit the earth.**

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,

 **For they will be filled.**

Blessed are the merciful,

 **For they will receive mercy.**

Blessed the pure in heart,

 **For they shall see God.**

Blessed are the peacemakers,

 **For they shall be called children of God.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy Spirit, we confess our emptiness. We confess that the ways of the world drain us. We confess that the rushing around and busyness of our lives have filled us with things that are often meaningless. The worldly measures of success slip through our fingers. Fill us, Holy Spirit, with Your breath. Fill us, Holy Spirit, with Your energy. Fill us, Holy Spirit, with Your love. Guide us into the ways we have been taught by the prophets: to do justice, to practice loving-kindness, and to journey humbly with our God. Guide us into the way that leads to life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The prophet Isaiah spoke long ago: “God is about to do a new thing, now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” God is restoring us, now. God is making a way for us, now. God is speaking through the noise of the world right to us and showing us how to live. How to restore the earth, renew our resources, rebuild our communities as part of the reign of God. Know that You are loved, renewed, and restored. Go and share this Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Restorer and Repairer of the World, call us into the work of justice. Help us to heal the earth, to replant and cultivate and reuse. Help us to heal the nations, to reach out, to listen, to share what we have. Help us to heal ourselves, to speak deep truths to our values, to listen to You, to shed the ways of the world that lay heady burdens upon us. Guide us into the way of life as taught by the prophets of old. Keep us to the ways of wisdom as shared from the songs of the psalmists. Hold us to the promises of the covenant written on our hearts. In the name of Christ, who came to repair and restore and make all things new, we pray. Amen.