Worship Resources for February 22nd, 2015—First Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

Narrative Lectionary: Forgiveness, Matthew 18:15-35 (Psalm 32:1-2)

During the season of Lent, our Hebrew Scriptures focus on God’s faithfulness through God’s covenant. We begin with the covenant with Noah and creation after the Flood, that God would never again destroy the earth by flood. God’s sign of the covenant is his bow in the clouds—in other words, God has hung up the weapon against the earth. God’s arrows have been laid down and God’s bow is hung up. This is permanent; this is an everlasting covenant, not only with the people of God, but with all of creation.

Psalm 25:1-10 sings of God’s faithfulness to those who are faithful to God’s ways. God will lead those who are astray—sinners--back to the right way, and teaches those who are humble. Those who are faithful to God will wait and trust in God faithfulness, forgiveness, and truth.

1 Peter 3:18-22 compares the saving act by God of Noah and his family to the saving act of baptism. Though Noah and his family led righteous lives, it was the act of God that saved them. For the early Christians who were trying to follow the ways of Christ, the writer of 1 Peter assures them that it is God who saves them in their baptism. The act of Christ dying on the cross saves us, not anything we do, but our actions of following Jesus respond to the grace of God in our lives.

Mark 1:9-15 goes back to the baptism of Jesus, which began the season after Epiphany, to the temptation in the wilderness which begins the season of Lent. Mark’s account is short and to the point. There are no details of Jesus’ temptations by the devil, no scriptures quoted, just that Jesus was driven into the wilderness by the Spirit, and that he was tempted by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts and angels waited on him. In Matthew and Luke’s account, we focus on the temptations themselves and Jesus’ response, but in this account, maybe we should focus on who was with Jesus: the wild beasts, and the angels. Jesus was with the very earthly—creatures of the wild—and the very heavenly angels. Heaven and earth meeting, not at the temple of God in Jerusalem, but out in the wilderness.

The Narrative Lectionary theme is Forgiveness, and Jesus’ teaching about resolving conflict and forgiving others. Jesus tells the parable about the Unforgiving Servant, who could not forgive others the very thing he asked for forgiveness of. This is very important to understand: we are asked to forgive others for the very things we still do. Jesus tells us we must forgive, but also makes it clear we are to forgive our brothers and sisters. But we must be careful in stressing forgiveness to those who have suffered abuse. Forgiveness is not the same as trust. It is possible to forgive others beyond what we have done ourselves—and we know that forgiveness can be healing and releasing—but what Jesus calls us to do is to forgive others for the things we have done, so we can be forgiven ourselves. Jesus does not call upon victims of abuse to forgive their abusers. Instead, Jesus calls upon us to forgive those who do the same things we do.

Psalm 32:1-2 is a blessing reminding us that those who are forgiven are happy and blessed. For those who strive to do what is right, who do not bear ill will or deceit, God’s blessing is for them.

We are called to be faithful to God’s ways because God has remained faithful to us, through the covenants of old, through the promises of our future, and through God’s forgiveness and grace now and always. God is faithful in the work of creation and the promise of the new day. God will see us through the valley of the shadow and the wilderness of temptation. If we remain faithful and wait for God, we will see God’s faithfulness endure forever.

Call to Worship

Glory to God, in whom we put our trust.

 **Glory to God, who remains faithful to us.**

Glory to God, who leads us away from temptation,

 **Glory to God, who leads us into new life.**

Glory to God, who forgives us and loves us.

 **Glory to God, who sent us Jesus Christ.**

Let us give all praise, glory and honor to God,

 **Who was and who is and who is to come, the Almighty.**

 **Glory to Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of faithfulness, we confess that we have been unfaithful. We have put our trust in worldly goods and wealth. We have put our trust in leaders who seek their own interests and fail the people. We have turned away from You, who have never abandoned us, but we have abandoned Your ways. Forgive us for our misplaced trust and misguided faith. Lead us back to You. In the name of Jesus, who is leading the way to the cross, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God’s faithfulness is new every morning. Every morning we have a new day with creation, with the Creator and all our brothers and sisters. Every day is a new chance for forgiveness, healing, and new life. Seize the day, go forth with God, and live into the blessings of love, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Amen.

Prayer

Guiding Spirit, in this season of Lent we are wandering in the wilderness, and temptation is all around us to abandon You and seek our assurances elsewhere. Guide us into Your ways because we know that You remain faithful even when we fail. Guide us in our lives to love our neighbor as ourselves and to seek forgiveness where we have wronged others and You. Lead us into Your New Life now that leads to eternal life in Your reign. Guiding Spirit, lead us onward into Your paths. In the name of Christ, who shows us the Way, we pray. Amen.