Worship Resources for February 23, 2020—Transfiguration Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary: Exodus 24:12-18; Psalm 2 or Psalm 99; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Matthew 17:1-9

Narrative Lectionary: Transfiguration, Mark 8:27-9:8 (Psalm 27:1-4)

God called Moses up Mount Sinai to receive the stone tablets of the commandments in Exodus 24:12-18. Moses told the elders to wait for him while he went up on the cloud covered mountain. Appearing like a devouring fire on top of the mountain, God came to meet Moses in all of God’s glory. Moses left Aaron and Hur to help mitigate any disputes while he was away with God on the mountaintop, forty days and forty nights.

God is the one who truly reigns in Psalm 2. The psalm, probably composed for the coronation of a new king of Israel, sings of how God has appointed their king, that while nations conspire, God is the one who reigns. The psalmist sings from the point of view of God, and then of the new king, whom God has chosen and adopted as their child. However, all kings, even the newly crowned one, are subject to God, and ought to submit to God’s ways.

Psalm 99 is also a song of God’s reign. The psalmist sings of God who reigns above, calling the people into praise. The psalmist sings of what God has done, establishing justice and equity. In calling the people to praise, the psalmist recalls those that God appointed: Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, priests and prophets, who kept God’s ways. God answered them when they called, and forgave them. The psalmist concludes by calling the people to worship at God’s holy mountain, for God is holy.

2 Peter 1:16-21 speaks of being an eyewitness to God’s declaration that Jesus was the Son, the Beloved, with whom God was well-pleased. Purporting to be from Peter, this portion of 2 Peter claims to have heard that voice on the mountain with Jesus, at the moment of his Transfiguration. That eyewitness moment confirms the prophetic message they have received. The writer states that prophecy doesn’t come from human will, but from the Holy Spirit spoken through those God has chosen (and the NRSV interprets those chosen by God as both men and women).

The Transfiguration occurs in Matthew 17:1-9. Jesus, Peter, James, and John traveled up a high mountain, by themselves, and Jesus was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white and his face shining like the sun. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Peter spoke up that it was good for them to be there, and suggested making tents for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. But while he was speaking, a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” The disciples fell to the ground, overcome with fear. But Jesus then touched them. “Get up, and do not be afraid.” Jesus was alone, and as they walked down, Jesus told them to tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man had been raised from the dead.

The Narrative Lectionary also focuses on the Transfiguration from Mark’s account in 8:27-9:8. In this larger context, Jesus had just asked the disciples who people said that he was. When Jesus asked the disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter boldly declared that Jesus is the Messiah. But Jesus ordered all of them not to tell anyone about him, and then began to teach that the Son of Man would suffer and be rejected, and killed, and then, after three days, rise again. Peter pulled Jesus aside to rebuke him, but Jesus then rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me Satan!” Peter was setting his mind on human things, not on divine things. Peter, who thought he understood one moment, betrayed that he truly didn’t understand who Jesus was. Jesus then taught the crowd that if they wanted to follow him, they had to deny themselves and take up their cross. Deny their own fear and shortcomings. Those who wanted to save their life would lose it. Six days later, Jesus went up the mountain with Peter, James, and John—and once again, Peter thought he understood. He wanted to make dwellings for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, as if they would all stay a long time. But the point was not to remain on the mountain with these prophets. The point was to listen to Jesus.

The psalmist begins in Psalm 27 by declaring that God is their salvation, their light, their stronghold, so of whom shall they be afraid? They remain confident in God, even when pursued by their enemies, and they ask only to live in the house of the Lord all the days of their life, and to behold the beauty of God.

I’m struck by the fact that Jesus touched the disciples in Matthew’s account of the Transfiguration. Jesus’ touch is assurance. “Get up, and do not be afraid.” When Jesus touches someone, there is healing. There is power. Perhaps that touch to the disciples was all they needed. The phrase, “Do not be afraid,” appears 59 times in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. God’s assurance during times of deep change is meant to be of comfort. The voice from heaven may have been booming, but Jesus’ touch is steady. It’s okay. Don’t be afraid. It’s just me, and you know me. It will be okay.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 27:1, 13-14)

The Lord is my light and my salvation;

 **Whom shall I fear?**

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;

 **Of whom shall I be afraid?**

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in this lifetime,

 **Be strong, take heart, and wait for the Lord.**

Come, let us worship our God,

 **In whom we find our rest and refuge,**

 **In whom we shall not be afraid.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of Wholeness, God of Healing, we come to You in our broken world. We confess our own brokenness, the places where we have sinned, caused harm unintentionally, or at times intentionally, to ourselves, others, and our world. We confess the brokenness of the world, the systems of racism and sexism, the homophobia and gender violence that we have experienced, or have witnessed upon others. We confess the system of wealth and consumption that violates and preys upon the poor. We confess our ableism, often not recognized, where we fail to include and offer accessibility to all. We confess all this brokenness, O God. We confess when we’ve been unaware of our own prejudice. We lift up our own wounds and hurts. We pray for wholeness, O God. Come, Lord Jesus, Come. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance (from Psalm 27:14)

The psalmist sang, “I believe I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” We know waiting is hard, but we know that God is with us. God forgives us, and mends us together. We are alive and need each other. Do not be afraid to receive forgiveness. Do not be afraid to offer forgiveness. For in the giving and receiving, we heal each other, and know God is with us. Go and share the good news. Amen.

Prayer

Shaper God, shape us into the people You desire us to be. Mold us so that we conform to Your ways of love, justice, and mercy. Create in us minds that ask questions and hold uncertainty, minds that are open to change and transformation. Fill us with Your loving Spirit, to be transformed for the world. You are our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, and in You, all things are made new. Amen.