Worship Resources for February 24—Second Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Luke 13:31-35; Philippians 3:17-4:1

In our Old Testament thread for Lent, we are focusing on the promises of God. We echo back to last week’s passage in Deuteronomy of the promise fulfilled to Abraham and Sarah, wandering Arameans whose descendants entered their homeland with the reminder to welcome the stranger. This week, we read in Genesis 15 and hear the beginnings of that great promise to Abraham and Sarah, the promise of a home, the promise of a future full of hope.

Psalm 27 reminds us that God is always present with us, even when evil surrounds us—God is near. Even when times are tough—God is close by. Even when it seems that all hope is lost, we believe in the goodness of the Lord and have faith with courage that God’s presence will not fail us. The psalmist sings that even when hope seems foolish, remain strong and take heart.

Luke 13:31-35 is a short passage, of a time when Herod, who had already killed John the Baptist, was looking for an opportunity to kill Jesus as he drew closer to Jerusalem. We are reminded through this passage that not all Pharisees were the “bad guys.” It’s easy to condemn an entire group of people for the actions of a few, but in this case (and in John 3 with Nicodemus who also mentions there are others who know he is from God) there are Pharisees who, while maybe questioning who Jesus is and his motives, do not seek his harm. The Pharisees here warn Jesus that Herod is trying to kill him, and to get away from Jerusalem. But Jesus will not be swayed. In strong language, Jesus tells them to tell Herod that he is doing what he was called to do, and Jesus also laments over Jerusalem. So many have tried to warn the people, especially the religious leaders and the ruling elite, that they were going astray from God’s ways, but they were unwilling to give up their power. Then, in a moment unlike any other (and not recorded in the other Gospels), Jesus invokes the image of the mother hen gathering her chicks together. Here, the power that Jesus describes is to gather and protect, unlike the power in Jerusalem that was used to rule and dominate. The power that comes from God is a power of protection, of bringing together, of healing and hope (as demonstrated when Jesus tells the Pharisees to tell Herod what he is doing—casting out demons and healing the sick), not a power of domineering, destruction and greed over others.

Philippians 3:17-4:1 echoes this concept of power demonstrated by Jesus: Paul grieves for those who live in the ways of the world, who live by greed and destruction, who desire power over others. This is not the way of Christ and it is certainly not the way of the kingdom of God. God’s power is love that is transforming. As Jesus said, the first will be last and the last will be first—whoever wishes to be first must become last of all and servant of all. Paul clearly states that those who live by the way of the world will die by the way of the world, and those who live for Christ now will live with Christ. Those live by consumption worship the God of consumption, which “is the belly” (vs 19). Those who live for others and love others have a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (vs 20).

So do not lose heart, as we are reminded in 2 Corinthians. Lent is a journey, and our spiritual lives are a journey. We do not see the end but we know the way we are going. Living for Christ means living for others and not for ourselves. Living for Christ means following God’s ways of love and justice and seeking justice for others. Living for Christ means knowing that the way of this world—to put ourselves first, to seek earthly success and gain, to “have it all”—means to lose it all in the end. Living for Christ means we trust in God, we trust in the hope of God for us, as Abraham and Sarah did so long ago, as Jesus taught us, and as the psalmists sang and Paul preached—we know we shall see the goodness of God in our lives, and we share that hope with others.

Call to Worship

The kingdom of God is at hand!

 **The reign of God has already come near.**

Repent, turn back to God, and seek forgiveness!

 **In Christ, we are forgiven and have new life.**

Prepare the way of the Lord!

 **Christ has already come, and Christ will come again.**

 **Come, let us worship and celebrate, drawing near to Christ on this journey of faith. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Navigator of our lives, You point the direction for us into new life, but we often go astray. We choose our own gains over the well-being of others. We desire to have comfort in this life, to not be faced with trials, to not worry about what we need to eat or wear—but we seek worldly assurances instead of Your guidance and direction. Forgive us when we have gone astray. Guide us back to Your path of justice, righteousness and mercy. May we seek the well-being of others above our earthly desires. May we meet the needs of others before worrying about the frivolities of life. Call us back to Your commandment to love our neighbors as ourselves. In the name of Christ, who guides us back on the Way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Step by step, God walks with us. Hand by hand, God works with us. Heart by heart, God’s love is shared with us. We are forgiven, we are loved, and we reconciled to God. Go and live out this Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Sojourning God, You called our ancestors away from a familiar land, across the wilderness to a new home. You led our ancestors out of the oppression of slavery into a home of freedom. You guided our ancestors out of the darkness of exile into a home of light and joy. You continue to call us away from darkness and oppression into light and hope, but you also call us out of the familiar into the unknown. Keep walking with us, guiding us when we stray from Your ways. Help us to know that even when we think we are stepping out alone, even away from You, You are still with us, holding us close, continuing to turn us back to home. In the name of Christ, who walked before us, walks with us, and walks ahead of us, we pray. Amen.