Worship Resources for February 25, 2018—Second Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38 or 9:2-9

Narrative Lectionary: Jesus Washes Feet, John 13:1-17 (Psalm 51:7-12)

See my Lenten Series “Spring Cleaning Your Spiritual Life,” focusing on the Hebrew Scripture readings.

God establishes the covenant with Abram and Sarai, renaming them Abraham and Sarah to reflect their role as the beloved ancestors of a great people. God fulfilled this covenant with one child, born to them in their old age. The covenant God establishes with them and their descendants is forever, but Abraham and Sarah only experienced a very small glimpse of this, in the birth of their son. In our lives, we only experience a glimpse of God’s unending love for us, but it endures forever.

The psalmist calls upon the people, descended from Jacob in Psalm 22:23-31, to be in awe of God, who rules over all nations and has dominion over all. God’s deliverance is proclaimed to “a people yet unborn,” ensuring that God’s covenant is forever. All who have gone before us bow to God, and all who will come after will hear of God’s deliverance and know God.

In this portion of Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul argues that God’s covenant with Abraham and all his descendants is not based on obedience to the law but through the righteousness of faith. In right-living that comes from faith in God we know God is with us. In other words, it is not about following a set of rules that makes us righteous, but our way of life that compliments the commandments and ordinances of God, a way of life that comes from our faith in God.

Peter doesn’t understand what Jesus is talking about when Jesus mentions his own death in Mark 8:31-38. Peter takes him aside and begins to rebuke him, not understanding that this must happen, and Jesus in turn says, “Get behind me Satan!” Peter often is quick to answer Jesus’ question, quick to declare faith, but like any of us, he falters when put to the test. Jesus declares that those who want to follow him must deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. Peter is worried about losing his friend, which is understandable, but he’s also worried about himself, and what it means to be following a leader who is preparing to die. It’s not what he expected to happen and not what he signed up for when Jesus called him out of the boat, and Peter can’t see that he is actually getting in Jesus’ way when he tries to “mansplain” Jesus about what really needs to happen.

Mark 9:2-9 was also the Gospel lesson two weeks ago for Transfiguration Sunday, and is a secondary choice for today’s readings. When Jesus, John, and Peter are up the mountain, Jesus’ appearance turns white, and Elijah and Moses appear with him. Both Elijah and Moses were taken up by God (though Deuteronomy speaks of Moses’ death, Jewish stories tell of Moses being taken up by God as was Elijah). Peter, always quick with his answer through he doesn’t always know what to say, suggests making tents for all three of them. But just as Elisha had to go on from Elijah, so Jesus must go on from Moses and Elijah. Jesus is now the one taking up the mantle. A voice from the clouds says, in a similar way to when Jesus was baptized, that “this is my Son, the Beloved—listen to him!” Jesus took upon the Gospel message from John, and now Jesus takes on the mantle of prophecy and law from Moses and Elijah.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Jesus washing the disciple’s feet. This story is only found in John’s account of the Gospel, on the night of the Passover meal. Jesus declares he is the disciple’s teacher, and that he is teaching them what they ought to do for one another by washing their feet. Peter doesn’t understand, and at first tries to stop Jesus, but then goes overboard and wants Jesus to wash his hand and his head as well. Jesus told Peter that Peter had to allow him to do this, but Peter thought it was a ritual of cleansing, and did not understand it was a ritual of preparation, and that Jesus as Rabbi was teaching them what they must do—which is to prepare new disciples to share the Gospel.

The psalmist sings in Psalm 51:7-12, asking God to make them clean from their sins. The psalmist asks God to create a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit in them. The psalmist asks for God’s blessing, and to have a new, fresh start with God.

Lent reminds us that we are preparing ultimately for a resurrected life. That we put to death what is holding us back from God and trust in what God’s desire is for our lives. Peter was still focused on the things of this world, on what others would think, on what long-term sustainability looked like for an itinerant preacher (not good if he’s going to talk about his own death). Abraham and Sarah longed for a child to pass on their inheritance, as in those days, that is what living forever looked like. But we know that eternal life with God is something somewhat indescribable. It both includes life now and life beyond death. But if we are focused only on one or the other—only on being saved and life after death, or only on the desires of this world—our vision is short-sighted. God’s covenant with Abraham and Sarah was with their descendants forever. They only saw a glimpse—in the birth of their only child—but that promise endures now and forever, and lives in us.

Call to Worship

Set your hearts on God’s call, and not on human desires;

**Come, journey with God in hope.**

Set your minds on the wisdom of God, not on human success;

**Come, journey with God in righteousness.**

Set your lives on God’s ways of justice, not human ways of revenge;

**Come, journey with God in peace.**

Set your spirits on God’s hope, peace, justice, and mercy;

**Come, worship God, and follow Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Eternal God, we confess our short-sightedness. We long for the desires of this world that urge us to take more for ourselves, out of fear of not having enough. We set our hearts on life after death and hopes for a heaven of our own making, instead of living out Your ways of justice here and now. We forget that eternity is now, and now is eternal. Forgive us for our selfishness. Forgive us for our shallowness. Call us into Your deep love and wisdom, so that we may live in righteousness and peace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

It isn’t too late to start on the journey. It isn’t too late to deny yourselves and the desires of this world, to pick up your cross and carry it. It isn’t too late to forgive those who have wronged you, and to seek forgiveness for where you have done wrong. It isn’t too late to try to love again. It isn’t too late to break your heart open for the world. Go with God’s blessing, love, forgiveness, and restoration. Amen.

Prayer

We are in too deep, O God. We are too invested in our own way of life. We are too entrenched in our own habits. We are too deeply attached to the things of this world that will fade away. Call us into eternal life, O God. Call us into the practices of love, peace, justice, and mercy. Lead us in the ways of wisdom, and plant in us the desire to seek and study and learn anew. Lead us out of the depths of our own desperate ways, and help us to find the deep life and deep love with You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.