Worship Resources for February 26, 2017—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, Luke 9:28-45 (Psalm 36:5-10 or 36:9)

God calls Moses to come up the mountain and receive the tablets of instruction in Exodus 24:12-18. In ancient times, mountains were viewed as the realm of the gods, with the earth being flat and the heavens above. Moses, by going up the mountain to follow God’s call, has drawn very near to God and God has drawn very near to him. God has given Moses the law and commandments have been written in stone to signify permanence, but God’s intent is for them to be used as instruction for the people. God’s presence is like a consuming cloud at first, and then a consuming fire, purifying Moses, consuming him fully in God’s glory, so he can be prepared to instruct the people in the right ways of life.

God is revealed as the King of Kings in Psalm 2. While worldly kings plot and conspire, God laughs, and prepares to show the kings who really is in charge. The psalmist warns that it would be better to grovel before God and to serve only God, because the worldly kings will fail and experience the wrath of God, the consequences of their actions.

Psalm 99 reminds the people that God is the true King, that God is the one who has called the priests and prophets, and they received the word from God and revealed the word to the people. The psalmist calls upon the people to worship God because God is holy, because God is the one who has spoken to them through the prophets and priests of old, and has forgiven the people.

The writer of the letters of Peter (most scholars agree that it was not Peter) uses the Transfiguration as a moment to prove that they were eyewitnesses to the prophetic message of God through Jesus Christ in 2 Peter 1:16-21. The writer claims this is not a clever myth, but an eyewitness account, and that they have a prophetic message for the people because of the revelation of Christ to Peter on the mountain. True prophecy is not a matter of personal interpretation, but divine revelation.

Matthew’s account of the Transfiguration occurs in 17:1-9. Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain, and suddenly his face is transfigured and his clothes become dazzling white. We don’t know what it means to have a face transfigured, only that Jesus’ face shown like the sun. It was something amazing and terrifying at the same time. And suddenly Moses and Elijah are with Jesus, talking to him. Peter, the one who always had to have the right answer first, decides to interrupt the three and say, “Lord, it is good for us to be here…” and then goes on to talk about making dwellings for each of them, as if Moses and Elijah are also anointed ones, kings sent by God. While Peter is talking, a bright cloud overshadows them and says, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with him I am well pleased—listen to him!” Similar words were spoken at Jesus’ baptism as the spirit descended. The disciples all fall down with fear, but Jesus tells them to get up, to not be afraid, and to not tell anyone about the vision until he rose from the dead. Peter was still looking at Jesus as a prophet, or as a worldly king, and wanted to be first to show the world that this was the new king. Instead, God kind of tells him to shut up and listen.

The Narrative Lectionary also follows the Transfiguration, but from Luke’s point of view. Luke has more details than Matthew’s version: Luke claims that Peter and the others were “weighed down with sleep.” The passage also goes beyond the Transfiguration story to an exorcism of a violent unclean spirit. The disciples had tried to cast out the demon but couldn’t. This story is often paired with the Transfiguration because it shows the disciples still did not fully understand their role and who Jesus was. Jesus immediately follows the casting out of the demon with telling the disciples he was going to be betrayed. Perhaps the disciple’s fear was why they could not cast out the demon, that they were unwilling to make a public spectacle, and that Jesus knows that doing miracles like this will get him in trouble with the authorities because the people will look to him instead of them. The disciples at this point are unwilling to risk this for themselves. They are willing to treat Jesus like one of their prophets, like a king, but worldly kings and prophets can be disagreed with, argued, and persuaded. Not Jesus. And the disciples are afraid to make a scene (remember how Peter rebukes Jesus after Jesus begins talking about his betrayal and death).

Psalm 36:5-10 sings of God’s steadfast love and righteousness, and these are gifts not only for the people, but for all of creation (vs. 6). Vs. 9 shares that through God’s light, we see light, for God is the fountain of life. Through God our vision changes, like a prism—we see the fullness of God’s abundant life through the light of God.

We keep trying to put God into our terms, wrestle with God on our turf, fit God into our box. But God keeps breaking out of the box, reminding us that everything is made and comes from God, and that no, we are actually subject to God’s terms. We keep trying to change Jesus into our own image and make tents for him, but instead, God reminds us of who Jesus is, and that we are called to listen to him. And he calls us to get up and follow him, not cower in fear. Jesus calls us to listen to him. Too often, I think we human beings try to tell God what we need when God already knows what we need. We also try to tell God what to do when God already knows what needs to be done. Instead, we need to listen and follow, and also recognize that we may not understand the fullness of what God is doing in the world and in our lives until the time of resurrection.

Call to Worship

Like the disciples, we want to please God in our words and actions.

**This is the Son, the Beloved; may we listen to him!**

Like the disciples, we want to have the right answers and be on the right side.

**This is the Son, the Beloved, may we listen to him!**

Like the disciples, we sometimes think we know better, that our ways are better.

**This is the Son, the Beloved, may we listen to him!**

We are the disciples of Christ Jesus,

**May we follow the One who leads us into life.**

May we listen to Jesus as he calls each of us,

**And may we know the fullness of God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving Jesus, One with our Living God, we confess that we have tried to put You in a box. We have tried to make understanding You and Your ways simple and easy for us and difficult for others. We have set burdens upon others that we do not bear ourselves. We have attributed wealth and worldly success as blessings from You, contrary to Your teaching. We have determined that serving our own interests best serves You, because we have mistaken worldly happiness for the joy that Your love brings. Forgive us. Call us away from the temptations of the world to put You in a box, and instead, break open in us Your ways of love, forgiveness, mercy, and justice. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

There is no mountain too high, no valley too low, for God to find us. There is no limit on grace or forgiveness, and God’s steadfast love is unmeasurable. Know that You are beloved by God, forgiven, and restore. Now, go, share the Good news, and live into God’s ways of justice and peace, knowing that the power of God’s love is far beyond what we could ever hope and imagine. Amen.

Prayer

Gardening God, You are at work in our world, breathing life into the bulbs buried deep, into the soil that is thawing and breaking in the sun’s warmth. You are at work in our world in the budding of leaves preparing to come. You are at work in our world through the song of the early spring birds returning. You are at work in the world converting carbon monoxide into oxygen through the very trees You planted. You are at work in the seeds You have planted inside each of us. When the world wants to hold on to the cold of winter, You are the spring that is bursting forth, resisting its icy grip. When we misuse the world’s resources, You are the One that plants dandelions in the middle of paved parking lots. You are the One that finds a way. Help us to seek better care of Your creation, and to participate in Your creative work in the world and in us. Amen.