Worship Resources for February 28th, 2016—Third Sunday in Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Narrative Lectionary: Parable of the Tenants, or Taxes to Caesar, Mark 12:1-12 or 12:13-17 (Psalm 86:8-13)

The prophet Isaiah shares the words of God to the people coming out of exile, to remember that what they seek in this world is not what God desires for them. God tells the people to work for what satisfies, to seek the ways of God. God will make an everlasting covenant with the people and they will be an example to the nations, even the ones they do not know.

In Psalm 63:1-8, the psalmist sings of their soul’s desire for God and that only God can satisfy. The psalmist meditates and thinks about God, their longing is for God, and with their lips they will praise and bless God.

Paul speaks of the ancestors of Israel who came out of Egypt into the wilderness. Using the language of baptism, and the metaphor of Christ as the rock, Paul retells the story, with the people passing through the Red Sea as a sort of baptism, and striking the rock for water as Christ provides living water. However, they need to remember how the people perished in the wilderness when they didn’t turn to God’s ways, and so will the church in Corinth should they not follow the ways of Christ. They will be tested, as they have put God to the test. 1 Corinthians 10:13 is a particular verse that has been taken out of context, often falsely summarized as “God will never give you too much to handle.” God will never test you beyond your strength—but that doesn’t mean in life we aren’t given too much to handle. The world gives us an awful lot.

Jesus begins in Luke 13:1-9 speaking about two tragedies that had happened: one in which Galileans had been killed by Pilate, and a tower collapse in Siloam in which eighteen people died. Jesus explains that neither group did anything to cause what happened to them—they were no worse sinners than anyone else—but God is calling them to repent or they will die just like everyone else. Jesus tells the parable of the fig tree, a tree that wasted its soil and never produced a fig, but was given one more chance. All of us are called to repent and turn back to God—though none of us deserve death, our end will not change unless we turn back to God.

The Narrative Lectionary has two choices from Mark 12. In verses 1-12, the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, Jesus tells a story in which it is clear that the owner of the vineyard did not send his son with the purpose for him to die, but rather in hope that the tenants would finally listen to him, since they had not listened to the messengers before. And just like some who had been killed, the son was also killed and thrown out of the vineyard. Some of the leaders wanted to have Jesus killed after telling that parable, knowing it was about themselves. Jesus makes it clear in the parable that though this is to happen, it is not God’s desire for it to occur, but God’s reign that is at hand will be not for those who have rejected Jesus.

The second choice in verses 13-17 takes place the following day, when other religious and secular leaders try to trap Jesus on the question of taxes. They believe that Jesus will end up proving one side over the other, that either Jesus will uphold the view of the Pharisees and anger the Herodians, who prosper under Rome, or that he will agree with the Herodians and anger those following the law. Instead, Jesus’ answer reminds them that the world is under God and that to give to the Emperor what belongs to him, is in reality giving to God what is God’s, because God is the maker of all.

Psalm 86:8-13 reminds the listeners there are no gods greater than God, that God alone is the one who does great and wondrous things. The psalmist pleads for God’s guidance and teachings, and gives thanks for God’s deliverance and steadfast love.

It’s not God that gives us too much to handle, but the world. It is not God that tempts us, but the world tempts us. It is not God that condemns us, but we condemn each other. We decide that entire groups of people deserve what they get, rather than seeing that all of us have fallen short, all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23). But through God’s steadfast love, there is redemption and forgiveness of sins. Through Christ, there is eternal life, which death has no hold.

Call to Worship

Everyone who is thirsty,

 **Come to the wellspring of life!**

Everyone who has nothing to eat,

 **Come and enjoy the feast!**

For God is setting a banquet table,

 **Christ is offering the well of eternal life!**

Come, for all things are ready;

 **Accept the invitation, for you are already welcome here!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we have played your role. We have judged others severely. We have condemned others. We have gloated when someone’s end seems fitting to us. Forgive us for our short-sightedness, our judgment, our self-righteousness. We remember that all of us have failed to live into Your image. We have failed to love our neighbors. We have failed to love our enemies. We have failed to bless instead of curse. Forgive us for our iniquities, and call us into repentance. In the name of Christ, who was holy and yet died as one of us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God leads us into life, sets us on right paths, and assures us that we are loved. There is nothing you can do that can take away God’s love for you. Extend that love and forgiveness to others, and you will find God’s love and forgiveness is already with you. Go, and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of Creation, create in us new hearts to love others, hearts that are free from the need to judge. Create in us new minds to seek Your wisdom, minds that are free from the desire to seek our own gain and satisfaction. Fill us with the spirit of compassion to be moved towards the welfare of others instead of the selfish greed we often feel. Create us anew, and fill us with Your Spirit. In Your name we pray. Amen.