Worship Resources for February 4th, 2018—Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 40:21-31; Psalm 147:1-11, 20c; 1 Corinthians 9:16-23; Mark 1:29-39

Narrative Lectionary: The Woman at the Well, John 4:1-42 (Psalm 42:1-3)

The Holy One speaks through the prophet to the people, who have heard the good news that they will return to their home out of exile. Isaiah 40:21-31 speaks of God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who is everlasting, who is the one that renews our strength. For the people who have waited for so long, God reminds them that God is the Eternal One, that God is the one who plants and pulls up, that brings down princes and strengthens the powerless. God is the one who is with them, and will renew them.

The psalmist reminds us in Psalm 147:1-11, 20c that God is the God of creation, but also the one who heals the brokenhearted and binds the wounds. God is the one who is both vast, beyond understanding, and yet very near. The psalmist calls upon the people to sing praises, for God delights not in those who are strong and swift, but to those whose hearts are near to God, to those who are in awe of God.

Everything Paul does, he argues, is for the sake of the Gospel. In 1 Corinthians 9:16-23, Paul tells the church in Corinth that he is a bit of a chameleon. Paul speaks differently to each church in his letters, because Paul knows there are different circumstances and cultures at play. But he does this not for his own gain, but to share the Gospel, and to share in its blessings. The church in Corinth faced deep division, and Paul addresses this division in his letter, but also stresses the greater message of the Good News of God’s love in Jesus Christ that brings all together.

Jesus heals many, including Simon Peter’s mother-in-law in Mark 1:29-39. After Simon’s mother is well and she begins to serve him, many others come to be healed. But in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus went away to a deserted place to pray. Even Jesus needed time to reconnect with God, to pray, and to rest. Simon and the others find Jesus and tell him that everyone is looking for him, and he is ready to go out to the neighboring towns, but only after he takes that time to pray.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Woman at the Well. Jesus’ baptized followers began to outnumber John’s, and Jesus decided to leave Judea to go back to Galilee, but stops in Samaria, at the well of Jacob, where he asks a Samaritan woman for a drink from the well. Jesus crosses all sorts of boundaries here, in a good way. He speaks with a Samaritan, though Jews do not like Samaritans, and he speaks to a woman alone. The woman is unmarried, having had five husbands and now living with another man—certainly a woman with a reputation in that day! But Jesus seems unconcerned with her reputation, only mentions it to share that he knows her, that he knows her story—and that through him, there is living water, the water of eternal life. The people of her village believe at first because of her words, until they meet him themselves. They know he is truly the Savior of the World. Most likely, this woman who may have been rejected by her community found acceptance and inclusion by Jesus. Jesus, a Jewish man, includes her, welcomes her, and tells her that he is the Messiah.

As a deer thirsts for flowing streams, so the psalmist begins with Psalm 42:1-3, so our soul thirsts for God. The psalmist has faced ridicule, and others have said, “Where is your God?” The psalmist does not give up hope, but wonders when their time will come, when they will behold the face of God.

Jesus went away to pray by himself after a day of healing. While traveling to Galilee, Jesus rests beside the well of Jacob and asks a Samaritan woman for a drink. The people who had waited in exile will finally return home, for God will renew their strength. Rest and renewal are part of our spiritual life. All too often, we rush about, and busy ourselves with busyness, but God calls upon us to give over our burdens. God calls upon us to look to the Everlasting One, knowing that our time is short, but God’s time is eternal. And God also gave us the Sabbath, because God needed a day of rest, too.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 42)

As the deer longs for flowing streams,

 **So our soul longs for You, O God.**

Why are you discouraged? Why is your soul cast down?

 **Our hope is in God, in whose name we praise.**

How do we comfort the disquiet in our hearts?

 **We trust, and put our hope in God, in whose name we praise.**

Come, renew your hearts, renew your spirits,

 **And know that our souls are renewed in Christ Jesus, in whose name we praise.**

Prayer of Confession/Brokenness

We confess, O God, that we run ourselves ragged, trying to be all things to all people. We confess, O God, that we are not good at remembering to rest, until exhaustion comes upon us. We confess, O God, that we have failed to live our faith by example, and either place unreasonable expectations on ourselves, or unreasonable expectations on others. Forgive us. Help us to slow down. Help us to listen well to what You want us to know. Help us to find renewal and rest, and to encourage others on this journey of faith. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Find peace and rest in Christ, and grant that others may find peace and rest. Know you are loved, forgiven, and restored. Go, share the Good News of God’s love, God’s forgiveness, and God’s restoration, by word, and by practice. Amen.

Prayer

You are the Water of Life. You are the Water that Refreshes. You are the Ever-Flowing Stream of Righteousness, the Still Waters of Peace, the Mighty Waters of Justice. You are the River of Life that flows into eternal life. You are the Water of Grace than rains on the righteous and the unrighteous. May we find refreshment. May we find rest by your still waters. May we find our thirst quenched so we can go on another day. In the name of Living Water, we pray. Amen.