Worship Resources for February 9th, 2014—Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 112; 1 Corinthians 2; Matthew 5:13-20

The prophet Isaiah cries out to the people to seek God’s ways and put aside their own ways. They do not worship God, they follow their own desires. They ignore the poor around them and feed themselves. But God tells them that if they stop blaming others, if they start looking to the needs of others and give out of what they’ve been given, they will see light out of darkness. God will deliver them and guide them into new life and they will see restoration and God’s promises renewed. There is hope, if they turn away from selfishness and their own desire for self-survival and look to the needs of the poor and hungry. God will provide for all, if they give out of what they have.

Psalm 112 sings of the blessings for those who follow God’s ways, who strive for justice and give mercy. The ones who follow God’s statutes will be generous and righteous, and will find God’s blessings in their lives. The psalmist sings that those who are righteous are the ones who are generous with what they have and share with the poor, and they will be blessed.

1 Corinthians chapter 2 continues Paul’s discourse with the Corinthian church, that they follow Christ who gave his life for them. Again, he proclaims Christ crucified. Christ emptied himself of worldly gain and so they ought to lay down their own selfishness and lust for power and seek God’s wisdom. The church in Corinth has not only squabbled over what teacher they follow, but even over what spiritual gifts they possess and which are greater (Paul will go into greater detail on this in chapter 12 and 14, and in a more positive way); here, Paul stresses the importance of understanding God’s spirit with use of spiritual gifts.

Matthew 5:13-20 continues our series into the fifth chapter of Matthew. Jesus transitions into a discourse about the law after the Beatitudes, speaking first about the salt of the earth and then the light of the world. Jesus shows the disciples through this metaphor of being salt that their role is important. Using senses of taste and sight, Jesus shows how the disciple’s lives as witnesses change the perceptions of those around them. They will experience and understand God in new ways, but if they lose their saltiness—if they become bland, not following Jesus but living as they did before—they are useless. They are also the light of the world, and they show God’s light, so they must be bold and not hide who they are. In this, Jesus declares he has come to fulfill what the prophets have said and the law given by Moses. Jesus has not come to abolish it but fulfill it; however, as we read on in Matthew, we will see that Jesus gives a new interpretation (although other rabbis in his day were also interpreting the laws in new ways). Jesus (among other contemporaries) is concerned about how the law is lived out. Jesus speaks out against those who would exclude others and use the law to do so. But in this passage, Jesus reminds the disciples that they are to live into the commandments given by God, because the fullness of life is found there.

How do we live into God’s ways? Are they just a set of rules in which one obeys in order to have a good life? Or is God’s way *the way* to live? Do we just take them at surface value as rules, or do we read into them the message of God’s love for all people? We all know those who say they believe in God and the commandments and hate their neighbors. Jesus tells us we can’t do that. If we really follow the commandments, we understand the depth of the way God wants us to transform our lives, to live into the law of God, which is love. Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth is about how they have put other things above the cross, the symbol of God giving up everything for us. Jesus calls us to be the salt and light of the world, and in order to do that, we must transform our lives to live into God’s way of love.

Call to Worship

We are called to bring a new understanding of God: that God so loves the world.

**We are the salt of the earth.**

We are called to bring a new hope in God: that God gives us new life.

**We are the light of the world.**

We are called to follow the commandments and the law.

**The Law of God is to love God and to love one another.**

Come, let us be the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

**Come, let us love one another with the love of God.**

**Let us join together in our love of God to worship and follow Jesus.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we come before You acknowledging our brokenness. We have been broken by the ways of the world. Greed and selfishness of others have hurt us; our own desires for wealth and success have harmed others. Forgive us for not looking to Your ways, to seeing that our greatest need is to love You and to love our neighbors as ourselves. May we feel Your love and care, and Your forgiveness, as we are challenged to forgive and love one another. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God has knit us back together again, stitched us together, and we are stronger than before. When the world tears us apart, God brings us together again, through forgiveness, reconciliation, and love. Know that nothing can ever tear you from God. You are God’s beloved child. Amen.

Prayer

Almighty God, You have set before us the path but we have wandered on our own to try to find our way. Sometimes we are like toddlers and we hear Your call and come back. Other times, we are children testing boundaries, ignoring Your call until fear finally makes us look back. And still other times we are full of youthful rebellion, demanding to be cut loose and set free, not knowing how much we still need to seek Your wisdom and guidance. But most of all, too often we think we are adults and have figured it all our and know our own way, only to stumble and stray so far. Remind us, parental God, that we are always Your children, that we are never fully grown up in Your sight, that we always have much to learn. Help us to seek You every day, to acknowledge that we need Your wisdom and guidance, and help us to return to the path and walk with You. In the name of Christ, who is our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.