Worship Resources for February 9th, 2020—Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 59:1-9a (9b-12); Psalm 112:1-9 (10); 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 (13-16); Matthew 5:13-20

Narrative Lectionary: Death of John the Baptist, Mark 6:1-29 (Psalm 122)

The prophet Isaiah calls out the people returning from exile, warning them that they are returning to their old ways in 59:1-12. The people had been in exile for over sixty years, and as they come home, some have begun to seek power and oppress others, but hide behind their religious piety. The prophet calls them and their religious practices out on behalf of God, for the fast God chooses is to undo oppression, to break the barriers of injustice, to share bread with the hungry and homes with the homeless. If they practice this fast, God will answer their cries, and their light shall break forth like the dawn. Their ancient ruins shall be rebuilt, and they shall be called repairers of the breach, restorer of the streets.

The psalmist sings praise for those who keep God’s commandments in Psalm 112:1-10. Those who keep God’s ways, which include being generous and just, will know God’s blessings. Those who keep God’s ways will not be afraid and will be grounded in God. Those who refuse to live in God’s ways see the righteous and are angry, for their desires are unfulfilled.

Paul speaks of God’s Wisdom in 1 Corinthians 2:1-16. When Paul first came to the church in Corinth, he didn’t come with lofty words or proud confidence, but came to them in humility, sharing only the truth of Christ crucified. God’s wisdom uses what the world sees as foolishness, as weakness, to reveal through the Spirit what God has prepared for those that love God. Paul states that as they have received the Spirit, they have also received spiritual gifts—but those who are not spiritual do not understand.

Jesus continues to teach in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:13-20. Jesus teaches the disciples that they are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. They must shine their light, be faithful in the world to God. Jesus then tells the disciples that he has not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. The commandments are not to be broken, but to be lifted up. They must live out God’s ways in the world, being more righteous than those who are already committed to the law of God—seeing the commandments as a way of life to be lived into.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the death of John the Baptist and Jesus’ rejection in his hometown in Mark 6:1-29. Jesus, teaching in his hometown synagogue, is met with rejection by his neighbors. They all know him, know his family, know where he came from, so who does he think he is? He was amazed at their unbelief, so he went out into the countryside to teach, sending out the twelve two by two to minister to those in need. He told them to not take anything with them but to simply rely on the hospitality of others. When King Herod heard of Jesus, as his reputation grew, he wondered if it was John the Baptist come back to life, for he had John beheaded. Herod had arrested John, for John denounced Herod publicly for marrying his brother’s wife. But Herod actually liked John, and knew he was a holy man, so he didn’t want to kill him. But in a rash oath to his daughter, offering her anything she wanted after he danced for him and his guests, she asked for John’s head on a platter. After Herod had John killed, John’s disciples buried his body in a tomb.

The psalmist sings of Jerusalem, praying for the city’s peace in Psalm 122. The psalmist declares that Jerusalem is where the thrones of judgment are set, the thrones for the house of David. The psalmist concludes by praying for peace and security and wishing peace upon all.

What does God require of you, the prophet Micah asked long ago in Micah 6:8. Micah responded with doing justice, practicing loving-kindness, and walking humbly with God. The passages this week fit into that theme: what does God require of us? Living righteously isn’t about paying lip-service to religion and going through the motions. It’s about living out justice, breaking down the walls of oppression, participating in the work of reparation of the world. Jesus teaches the disciples in the sermon on the Mount that the world doesn’t need more people speaking for religion. The world needs more people living it out, fulfilling what religion promises: new life for all.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 58:3, 7, 10-12)

Do not serve your own interests, but choose the way of God:

**Loose the bonds of injustice, let the oppressed go free!**

Share your bread with the hungry, house the homeless poor,

**Clothe the naked, and remember that all people are our family.**

If you offer food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,

**Your light shall rise in the darkness.**

God will satisfy your needs like a spring whose waters never fail,

**You shall be called repairers of the breach,**

**The restorer of streets to live on.**

Come, worship God, who restores us and gives us a new name;

**Worship God, who calls us children, and kin to one another.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that we have fallen short. We have failed to repair the relationships we have broken. We have not sought forgiveness where we have gone wrong. We have shirked our responsibilities in the wounding of the world. Call us into accountability. Call us to take responsibility when we accept the systemic sin in the world without question as it benefits us. Guide us in Your wisdom to seek the righteous life, to live into Your ways of justice. Help us to recognize the places where we have privilege, and work for those who have been pushed to the margins or completely shut out. In the name of Christ, who builds the kin-dom, who repairs the world, and who restores us to life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God is with us. God is encouraging us. God is there when we recognize our wrongdoings. God is there to lift us up and restore us. Know that you are God’s beloved. Repair what has been broken, restore what has been taken, and do the hard work to live into God’s ways. You are not alone. We are all here on the journey with you, together. Go and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Divine Creative, You have woven the universe in a symphony of particles, atoms, and molecules, fashioning life on our beautiful planet. You have woven into the tapestry the threads of justice, mercy, and peace, the braids of love, faith, and hope. Help us to repair the damage we have caused to this wondrous earth, to restore what has been broken in our humanity. Guide us to create as You create in us, to build up rather than destroy. Teach us to reach and bridge where there are divides, to make something new out of what is old and unrepairable. Creator of us all, create in us a new appreciation for what You are continuing to make, and help us to let go of what needs to be unmade by our hands. Amen.