Worship Resources for March 1st, 2015—Second Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:23-31; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38 or Mark 9:2-9

Narrative Lectionary: Laborers in the Vineyard, Matthew 20:1-16 (Psalm 16:5-8)

Our Hebrew Scriptures in Lent fall on the theme of God’s covenant, and this week we read of the covenant with Abram and Sarai. God has already called them to a new land, away from their families and the home they have known, and promises that a great nation will come from them. God gives them new names, names full of hope and the promise of their future, descendants beyond counting, peoples beyond measure. God gives them the promise of a future with hope that they will only glimpse in the birth of their only child.

Psalm 22:23-31 sings praises to the God of all the nations, reminding the people that they are the descendants of Jacob, therefore the descendants of Abraham and Sarah. God is faithful to their ancestors, to all who “sleep in the earth” as well as all the families of the nations upon the earth, and to a people yet unborn. God is the God of the living, beyond time, beyond this life we know, and beyond death.

Romans 4:13-25 is Paul’s declaration that the promise of God through Abraham did not come from the law, but through faith. Abraham and Sarah are the parents, the ancestors of all. The law was given to a small segment—the descendants of Jacob, but hope was given to Abraham and Sarah, the parents of all, and that through faith, all can be reconciled to God. Through faith, we live into righteousness. Through faith, the law is fulfilled. Through faith, Christ has died and Christ has risen, for all of us.

Mark 8:31-38 contains Peter’s lack of understanding. He declares in one breath, when asked by Jesus “Who do you say that I am?” that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God—but in the next breath, in this passage, he rebukes Jesus when he begins to talk about his death and resurrection. Jesus was not the kind of Messiah Peter was looking for. Peter was looking for a Messiah who was going to establish an earthly kingdom, who would establish order and rule in Jerusalem, but Jesus rebukes him and tells him he is setting his mind on worldly things. Jesus declares to the crowd and the disciples that those wish to follow him must deny themselves, take up the cross and follow him. Those who wish to save their life must lose their life.

Mark 9:2-9 is the Transfiguration, which was also the Gospel lesson two weeks ago—and takes place after the previous passage. Once again, Peter does not understand. He is still looking for a worldly Messiah, one who will establish the throne of Israel, and he sees Elijah and Moses as affirming this kingdom, and wants to make dwellings for them—but when the voice of God says “This is my son the Beloved, listen to him!” they are reminded to look to what Jesus is saying and doing now, declaring that the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Laborers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20. The landowner pays each laborer, who were hired at different times of the day, the same wage. The ones who worked all day are upset that they were paid the same. The landowner asks them if they are jealous. Everything belongs to him, and he is the one who chooses to give generously. The world is God’s creation, and God desires to give us all the gift of new life, eternal life—it is us who put limitations and create burdens for others, but God has given the gift of life freely to all. But in the reign of God, the ways of the world are flipped over, and the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.

Psalm 16:5-8 reminds us of the blessing it is to have God in our lives. God is the one who counsels us, who teaches us, who leads us and whose steady presence is with us always. All blessings come from God, and when we choose to remember that God is always with us, we are open to experiencing those blessings.

God’s desire is for all of us to know God’s love, and God’s promise of eternal life that begins right now in this lifetime, that death does not have a hold on us. But we keep thinking in worldly terms—success, fame, fortune. We think that eternal life is something we need to earn, to work for, and we judge others by how they live and work, instead of understanding this is a free gift from God, the gift of God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord, given for all.

Call to Worship

Following God’s ways is not easy;

**We are called to step out in faith.**

We do not know what will happen tomorrow;

**We are called to put our trust in God.**

We know that God’s love is always with us;

**We know that God never abandons us.**

Come, join together in this time of worship;

**Come, join together in following Jesus.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Author of Salvation, we confess that we have written our own versions of the life story. We have written in that we are not good enough, but others are worse. We have crafted obstacles to overcome that You did not put in our way, and we have written in shortcuts in which we do not have to change, but others do. Forgive us for not handing over the pen. Forgive us for not recognizing that You have already written our names into Life, and that we must live for others. Forgive us for not recognizing that the ending was at our baptism along with the beginning of our eternal life in You. Rewrite Your love into our hearts, and help us to share the Good News. In the name of Christ, who has written the new covenant in our hearts, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The promises of God are new in us. They are new in the flower bulbs that are still deep in the earth; in the buds on the trees that are getting ready, even in the plants that lie buried under feet of snow. God’s promise is new life, and it is a gift for you. You are forgiven, renewed and restored in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer

God of our ancestors, You have called us forth into a new day, but we tread the path of our ancestors, their teachings and traditions handed down to us. You call us into New Life but have shown us the way through the faithfulness of those who have gone before us. Grant us the wisdom to set out on new paths, knowing that You are with us, and that the whispers of our ancestors still help us to find the way. May our traditions of old help inspire us to forge new ways of living into Your love, peace and justice. Amen.