Worship Resources for March 1st, 2020—First Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Narrative Lectionary: First Last and Last First, Mark 10:17-31 (Psalm 19:7-10)

Please check out Lenten Themes and Resources here.

We begin the Revised Common Lectionary with the story of the first human beings in Lent, that they were put in the garden to care for it, but they were tempted to eat from the one tree they were told not to by God: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent tempts them that they should eat of it because then they will be like God. The temptation to have power like God, to have the worldly knowledge instead of Godly wisdom that was already with them, was too great to resist.

Psalm 32 is often attributed to David, a song of praise to God for forgiveness of sins. The psalmist knows they have gone astray and acknowledge their wrongdoing before God. God has delivered them from evil, and the psalmist counsels those listening to seek God’s wisdom and God’s ways for their life. The psalmist warns against being as stubborn as a mule, and instead, to know God’s steadfast love by placing their trust in God.

The Epistle lessons during this season of Lent are mainly from Romans and address the theme of sin in the world and the grace of God through Jesus Christ. The story of Genesis teaches that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not to be touched, or the humans would die—and because they did touch it and eat of its fruit, death came into the world. Paul explains in Romans 5:12-19 that through Jesus’ act offering his own life, we now have the free gift of grace and eternal life through Jesus Christ. Paul compares Adam and Jesus as both a first of their kind—Adam, the first human being, caused death to come into the world in his actions in the garden. Jesus, the firstborn of God, gives us grace and eternal life through his action of righteousness.

In Matthew’s account of the Temptation in the wilderness, Jesus is tempted by the devil three times while he is fasting and praying after his baptism. Jesus is first tempted to break his fast, to forget his whole reason for being in the wilderness, when the devil tempts him to make bread out of stones. Jesus quotes from Scripture that one does not live by bread alone, remembering why he came into the wilderness in the first place, to draw close to God. Then the devil takes Jesus to the top of the temple, questioning again whether Jesus is the Son of God, calling him to throw himself off, stating that the angels would make sure he wouldn’t hurt himself. But Jesus reminds the devil that one is not to test God, even if Jesus has been fasting and praying for forty days. But the last temptation in Matthew’s account is to have all the kingdoms of the world under his control, if only Jesus would worship the devil. But Jesus tells him to go away, for he worships and serves only God alone. The temptation to have godlike power is the penultimate temptation in Matthew’s account, as it was for Adam and Eve in the garden—to have the same kind of power God has, but to wield it in a human way. Instead, as the apostle Paul later writes, Jesus chose to empty himself of power.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the rich man who came to Jesus in Mark 10:17-31. The rich man asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. He’s kept all the commandments, but he questions whether he’s done enough. Jesus is filled with compassion—the text in Mark reads that he loved the man—but tells him that he lacks one thing: he must go sell what he owns, give the money to the poor, and then he can follow Jesus because he will have treasure in heaven. But the man is shocked, and leaves grieving, because he has many possessions. Jesus then laments to his disciples that it is hard to enter the kingdom of God, and very difficult for those who are rich. Peter begins to tell Jesus, “look, we’ve left everything behind to follow you,” as if to justify their actions. Jesus acknowledges that those who do leave everything behind to follow Jesus will receive everything of the reign of God—but warns that those who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

Psalm 19:7-10 speaks of following the law of God, and that the ordinances of God are worth more than fine gold and sweet honey. God’s ways are perfect, true, right, and simple to follow: a clear vision for life.

The wisdom of God is not aligned with the knowledge of the world. The knowledge of the world teaches us what wealth is to be gained, how to invest, who to network with, how to act to get ourselves on top of the pyramid. The wisdom of God seems foolish—to become last of all, servant of all. The wisdom of God leads us to seek God’s ways of justice and righteousness, to let go of the world’s power and instead trust in God. The wisdom of God leads us away from the powerful to be in solidarity with the powerless and the marginalized. But the wisdom of God leads us to life. The knowledge of the world is a quest for power. The wisdom of God is love, compassion, justice, mercy, and righteousness. The world’s power falls through our hands like sand. The power of God’s love is eternal and can be known now.

Call to Worship (from Isiah 43:1-3)

God says, “Do not be afraid, for I have rescued you.

 **I have called you by name, you are mine.**

When you pass through the waters,

 **I will be with you.**

And through the rivers,

 **They shall not overwhelm you.**

When you walk through the fire,

 **You shall not be burned, and the flame will not consume you.”**

For God is the Holy One, our Savior.

 **Come, worship God, who leads us into life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Wise God our Savior, we confess that we have fallen for the world’s knowledge, a knowledge that claims to be of good and evil, but is truly of power and control. We have sought to gain an edge over others, to possess more by consuming more, to make sure our comforts and way of life are met before others can even simply live. God of Wisdom, forgive us, and lead us away from the ways of the world. Call upon us to remember what You have taught us in loving others, caring for the needs of others, sharing all the resources You have given us to be good stewards of the earth and all of creation. Call us into the ways of Wisdom, and away from the foolish knowledge of the world. Lead us into the life of the kin-dom, the beloved community that You have created for us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The call of God’s Wisdom is in your heart. Listen. Hear your own heartbeat, it beats the same as all others. The image of God is in you, and in one another. Listen. Love. Breathe. Care. Show the same grace and mercy that has been given to you, and love one another, always. Share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of the Wilderness, help us to find peace when we do not know which way to go. Help us to listen for Your Wisdom above the noise of the world. Help us to remember that when we face temptation, when it feels like the devil is near us, You are the one who made the wilderness and is always near us. You are the one who loves us. You are the one who teaches us the greater way of faith, hope, and love. Guide us through the barren landscapes of our life, reminding us that even in the deepest valleys, we are not alone, for You journey with us. We seek Your wisdom, hope, and insight, so that we might gain eternity in the moments we share in this life. Amen.