Worship Resources for March 13th, 2016—Fifth Sunday in Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8

Narrative Lectionary: End of the Age, Mark 13:1-8, 24-37 (Psalm 102:12-17)

Isaiah reminds the people that God has brought them through the sea in years past, that God is going to do something new. But what God does will be in line with what has been done before—God will make a path where there is none. God led an entire people out of slavery into freedom, and will lead a people out of exile to their home. All of the wild of creation honors God—for out of the wild God calls the people, and will provide for them in places through inhabitable, for God will make a way.

Psalm 126 is a song of praise to God who brings the people out of exile, who restores the city of David, who turns tears into joy. Those who left weeping and empty, will return with their arms full, for God restores what has been lost.

Philippians 3:4b-14 contains Paul’s persuasive statement that of all people, he has the authority to speak from his background, and yet his background means nothing in Christ. There are no credentials accepted in the reign of God; rather, one must shed their credentials, to anything worldly they believe makes them righteous, because true righteousness comes from God based on faith (vs. 9). There is no finish line here on earth, but all must “press on” to do the work of Christ in this world.

John’s version of Jesus being anointed at Bethany in 12:1-8 is the only version that names the woman who anoints him: Mary, Lazarus and Martha’s sister. Martha has served the meal and Lazarus is present, but just like in Luke 10:38-42, Mary comes to Jesus’ feet, this time to anoint them, and to wipe his feet with her hair. John’s account names Judas solely as the disciple opposed to her action, claiming the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor, and Jesus counters with “You always have the poor with you.” This is not meant to dismiss the needs of the poor, but rather that we always have opportunities to help the poor and we don’t often do it ourselves, but judge others who do not. Jesus tells Judas not to judge her for her act of kindness. We ought not to judge others for their acts of kindness and generosity, but we ought to judge ourselves for not caring for the poor among us.

The Narrative Lectionary covers Mark 13:1-8, 24-37 with the disciples and Jesus’ observations of the temple, and while the disciples marvel at the building of the temple, Jesus warns of the destruction of the temple and the coming of the Son of Man—and for all to keep awake, to be alert, watching for the signs of God doing something new. And while the world humanity has created will come undone, the world God intended, where death does not have a hold, will endure. Heaven and earth will pass away, because there will be no dividing line between death and life.

In the middle of a song crying for help, the singer in Psalm 102 remembers that God will have compassion for Zion, and will build up the city again. God will hear the prayers of the destitute, and all nations will know the glory of God.

God is doing something new, but in the busy-ness of our lives, we are not awake, not ready. We have forgotten God’s ways, and have fallen back on old habits, feeling entitled to God’s reign rather than working to participate here on earth. We need to remember the words of Paul, and to become like Christ not only in his life, but in death to the ways of the world.

Call to Worship

When we have turned away,

 **Turn our hearts back to You, O God.**

When our hearts have been broken and emptied,

 **Fill us with Your love, O God.**

When we have fallen into sorrow,

 **Overwhelm us with Your joy, O God.**

In this time of worship,

 **May we turn back to You, knowing Your love and joy are with us forever, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have forgotten Your ways. We have judged others rather than ourselves. We have thought ourselves better than others, more worthy than others, and have felt entitled to our place at the table while keeping others out. Forgive us, O God, for our arrogance and pride. Forgive us, O God, for our entitled ways that put ourselves above others. Forgive us, O God, for believing our point of view is the only one. Call us to repent, call us to seek forgiveness from others, and to humble ourselves before You. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is making all things new, including our minds and hearts. Allow God in, and let go of the ways of this world. Let go of your judgments and stubbornness. Let go of your entitlement and false assurances. Cling to God’s love, and love will cling to you. Go and love and forgive, knowing you are loved and forgiven, and rest in the assurance of God’s enduring presence. Amen.

Prayer

Creative God, You are always creating something new in our world and in our lives, unfolding Your story to a new page that we have not read. When we think we know it all, You show us how small we really are in the vastness of the Universe You have made. When we think we understand it all, You show us new insights and ideas beyond our comprehension. Help us to be open to what You are still creating in us and around us, to be ready for the next page, the next chapter, in Your marvelous story. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.