Worship Resources for March 16th, 2014—Second Sunday of Lent

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

We begin this second Sunday of Lent with the calling and blessing of Abram (Abraham) by God. Abram is being called away from the land of his father, whom he had traveled with from Ur to Haran. Abram and Sarai will leave not only the home where Abram’s father settled, but they will set out across unfamiliar land to a new home. All families on earth will be blessed through Abram and Sarai, and Abram and Sarai trust God and go to a new land.

Psalm 121 is an ancient song of assurance. When we look up to the mountains, where does our help come from? Not the mountains, but the one who made the mountains—our help comes from the Lord, maker of heaven and earth. God is the one who leads us forward and also watches out behind to make sure we are not lost. God watches our comings and goings and follows us, as we follow God, throughout our life.

Paul reflects on the call of Abram in Romans as showing how God has been faithful throughout the generations to the people, and that Abram’s faithfulness guaranteed the blessings of God for all generations. Abram trusted in God and followed God’s ways because of Abram’s faith. The law, given to Moses, would not come for generations later but Abram already lived out the commandments because of his faith. Paul’s argument is not that the law was wrong, but rather if one lived in righteousness, in faith, one already lived out the law. There are consequences to breaking the law; but when one lives out their faith, they will not break the law.

John 3 contains the encounter of Jesus with Nicodemus, a Pharisee who comes to visit Jesus by night. We are told that Nicodemus is a leader of the Pharisees and that there are others, for Nicodemus begins by speaking “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God.” But Nicodemus still comes to him at night, as if afraid to be found by others that he is visiting Jesus. Immediately he does not understand what Jesus is saying to him and questions him about being born from above. Jesus goes into a discourse about being lifted up and about eternal life for those who believe. And while so many of us know John 3:16, we often forget to quote John 3:17, that God sent his Son not to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. We are very quick to condemn others as not being born again, or being baptized the right way, or being true believes—or believers at all. Jesus seems less concerned about us saving others as he is about us looking into ourselves and asking if we really have been born from above. Are we living as children of God? Are we seeing God’s saving work in the world, or are we busy judging and condemning others? Nicodemus understands that Jesus was sent by God, but does not understand the message. Starting anew with one’s self seems much harder, much more difficult, than claiming to be right and others wrong. And that’s what happens sometimes when we only quote verse 16, so we believe so we might have eternal life, instead of also quoting verse 17, understanding that what we do with our belief is change our own lives, and not judge or condemn others.

We sometimes talk about Lent being the journey to the cross, reminding us of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem, and Jesus time in the wilderness of 40 days. We are also reminded that the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years. Our lives are a journey of faith, and in this time of repentance, of turning back to God, we remember that we have to do this ourselves. We are the ones who have to repent, to seek forgiveness, to be born from above, to believe for ourselves. This is not to condemn others. It reminds me of the spiritual,

“You have to walk that lonesome valley

You have to walk it by yourself

O nobody else can walk it for you

You have to walk it by yourself.”

Call to Worship (from John 3:16-17)

For God so loved the world

**That God gave us Jesus, the only Son**

So that everyone who believes

**May not perish but have eternal life**

God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world

**But in order that the world might be saved through him.**

God so loved the world

**God loves us all, and God offers us new life in Christ.**

**Come, let us follow Christ, the only Son, the Messiah. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, You are the Judge we answer to, but too often we have judged our neighbors and condemned them, before we know them, before we have even heard them speak. We have abused others by calling ourselves saved and others condemned; we have hurt others by trying to save them. We have forgotten, O God, that You have called us to judge ourselves, to seek forgiveness, to remove the log from our own eye. May we seek forgiveness where we have harmed others and may we deepen our trust in You. In the name of Jesus, who calls us to be born in a new way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God leads us into life. God is with us, in the beginning and the end, watching out for us and leading us on. God renews us, restores us, and sets our feet on right paths. God is our help and strength and comfort. Seek God, trust in God, and know that you are forgiven and loved. Amen.

Prayer

Creator God, maker of the heavens and earth, lead us to the still waters when the storms are raging. Lead us through the mountains and valleys; may we know You are guiding us always on this journey of faith. Sometimes we find You are leading the way; sometimes You are the one who pushes and prods us from behind, making sure we are not lost or lagging. Most of all, may we feel Your presence beside us and within us. Lead us into the way of life. In the name of Christ, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.