Worship Resources for March 17th—Fifth Sunday of Lent (St. Patrick’s Day)

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

In our Old Testament thread for Lent, we have been following the covenant of God, where God has been faithful even when the people have not. In our passage from Isaiah, we read that God is about to do a new thing. For the people who were taken into exile three generations before, God has not forgotten them. God has not abandoned them. Rather, God has continued to uphold the covenant, but is about to do a new thing. This new thing will encompass all of creation, including the wild animals, for God’s desire is to do something new in creation. We as Christians look back and see the hope of Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, as something promised long ago, but for the people coming out of exile, this was hope for a new future with God out of the darkness of exile and into the light of return.

Psalm 126 was most likely written after the Exile, remembering God’s deliverance and the joy of God’s restoration. What has been taken away will be returned, and there will be celebration. When we go through trials and challenges in our lives, we remember that God has promised not to abandon us, and we cling to the hope of restoration, of reconciliation, of new life.

John 12:1-8 tells of the anointing at Bethany. In John’s version, this is Mary, of Mary and Martha (in Mark and Luke the woman is unnamed, and in Luke she is a “sinner”), who chooses to anoint Jesus. This is Mary who witnessed Jesus raise her brother Lazarus from the dead. This is also Mary who fell down at Jesus’ feet and wept for her brother and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Reading this story in the context of who Mary, the sister of Martha, she seems to be the only one who understands what Jesus is about to do. Read in the context of Mary and Martha’s story in Luke, Mary, the same one who sat at Jesus’ feet to listen to him, fell at his feet to mourn and weep, and now, anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair, the same feet that will be nailed to the cross. This is a powerful image when Mary chooses to anoint his feet, because she has spent a lot of time at his feet! And from here, Jesus will enter Jerusalem, and on the night he is betrayed, he will choose to wash the disciple’s feet as well. Mary prepares Jesus for the work he is about to do; in turn, Jesus prepares the disciples. What have we been through in our lives that prepares us for the ministry of Christ? How is Christ preparing us, and how might we in turn prepare others?

In Philippians 3:4b-14, Paul declares that he desires to become like Christ, that he has suffered for him in order to be closer to him. Paul’s desire is to lose himself and become like Christ in order to know Christ—not for Paul’s own glory, but because of his desire to know Christ Jesus. Paul’s life has prepared him, but it has not been easy. He has suffered persecution and has lost much, but he knows his gain is Christ. So to, our desire should be to know Christ, not for earthly status, not to be a good person, not to be on the “right” side or even to “be” a Christian—our desire is that we want to know Christ because Christ loves us.

We are nearing the end of our Lenten journey. How has the season of Lent prepared you for the cross and the resurrection? How has the season of Lent helped you draw closer to Christ? How has Lent deepened or strengthened your faith?

Call to Worship

We come from all walks of life

 **Our God is with us yesterday, today, and forever.**

We have different pasts, and we have walked different paths

 **Our God is with us yesterday, today, and forever.**

We have gathered in this place, seeking forgiveness and new hope

 **Our God is with us yesterday, today, and forever.**

We journey forward knowing we are not alone.

 **Our God is with us yesterday, today, and forever.**

 **We journey together, brothers and sisters, with Christ. Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we confess that we have desired the things of the world over You. We have sought possessions over justice and mercy. We have turned away from those in need to climb the ladder of our own success. We have allowed ourselves to believe that living a good life for ourselves is our religion. Forgive us for following the false idols of our world. Turn us back to You and Your ways. Call us away from the desires of the world and set our desires upon You. In the name of Christ, who gave everything up, emptying himself on the cross, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is always doing something new. God is always turning our hearts back when we repent. God is always calling our names when we go astray. God is always bringing about reconciliation and hope. Know that you are loved and forgiven. As Jesus said, go, and sin no more. Amen.

Prayer

Loving Savior, You are calling us as Your ministers into this world. You have prepared us in our lives for the ministry of reconciliation and peace, justice and mercy. Where we have felt Your absence, O God, help us to comfort those who mourn and feel loss. Where we have experienced injustice, help us to stand for the oppressed and to speak out for the silenced. Where we have felt pain and suffering, O God, help us to pray and care for those who struggle with illness, anxiety and depression. Where we have felt hopeless, O God, help us to be living hope for the poor and the hungry, to do what we can to lift up one another. Call us into Your ministry, so that we might know You more fully. In Your name we pray. Amen.